DRAMATIS PERSONAE[1]

Euelpides [= "Of Good Hope"]
Peisthetairos [= "Persuasive Comrade" or "Persuaded by Comrades"]
Bird-servant of Tereus
Tereus, having become a Hoopoe Bird
Chorus of Birds [and its **Leader**]
Priest
Poet
Oracle-collector
Meton, a geometer
Inspector [of new colonies, for Athens]
Seller of Decrees
Messengers
Iris [the messenger goddess]
Heralds
A Father Beater
Kinesias, a dithyrambic poet
Impoverished "Sycophant" [a false accuser, who harassed the rich with lawsuits in order to get money by settlements]
Prometheus
Poseidon
Triballian [a barbarian god]
Heracles

[Mute Characters:
Xanthias and **Manodorus**—also called **Manes**: baggage-carrying slaves who accompany Euelpides and Peisthetairos
Procne
Basileia or **Queen**]

1. Bracketed material lacks manuscript authority; it is intended only to facilitate a first reading of the play. Line numbers are borrowed from the Greek texts of the plays; they will not always be sequential in English.

*Birds bought in market to lead them to Tereus

optimist → persuasion

[Enter **Euelpides** and **Peisthetairos**, the former with a jackdaw, the latter with a crow, and two servants carrying luggage.]

Euelpides [to his jackdaw]: Right on? Is *that* what you are bidding—
toward where the tree appears?

Peisthetairos [to his crow]: Split yourself!
[To Euelpides]: This one croaks to go *back*!

Euelpides [to his jackdaw]: Why is it, you rogue, that we are wandering up
And down?! We'll perish with this route of weaving about!

Peisthetairos: Woe is me—persuaded by a crow,
To go a roundabout route, more than a thousand stades[2] long!

Euelpides: Ill-fated am I, persuaded by a jackdaw,
To wear off the nails of my toes!

Peisthetairos: But where on earth we are, I no longer know!

Euelpides: But from here you could presumably find your way to the fatherland? 10

Peisthetairos: By Zeus, not even Execestides[3] could do it from here!

Euelpides: Groan!

Peisthetairos: Pal, you go that way.

Euelpides: Indeed, terrible things were done to us two, by that fellow of the Birds—that bird-tray-selling, black-biled, nut Philocrates,
Who claimed that these two would point out, to us two,
Tereus[4] (He's that hoopoe-bird who became a bird from those birds.[5])—
And who sold this jackdaw son of Tharreleides[6]
For an obol, and this one here for three obols—

2. A "stade" is a length of about 600 feet.

3. An Athenian citizen who was apparently under a cloud of suspicion of having barbarian slave ancestry; also mentioned at 764 and 1527.

4. According to the myth dramatized by Sophocles in a play no longer extant, Tereus was a king transformed by the gods into a hoopoe bird.

5. Euelpides comically and momentarily breaks the dramatic illusion, reminding the audience who Tereus is.

6. Apparently some haplessly short and chattering fellow in Athens.

The two of them don't know anything else except how to bite!
And *now*, what are *you* gaping at? Is it among the rocks there,
That you are going to drag us again? For there isn't any path *here*!

PEISTHETAIROS: By Zeus, there isn't any straight path *here* either!

EUELPIDES: Doesn't the crow say *anything* about the route?

PEISTHETAIROS: By Zeus, she isn't croaking the same now as before!

EUELPIDES: Well what does she say about the route?

PEISTHETAIROS: What else does she say, except that by gnawing she'll eat my fingers!

EUELPIDES: Isn't it simply awful that, when we need and
Are quite prepared to go to the crows,[7]
We can't find the way?
For we—Oh you men who are here witnesses to the account[8]—
Are ill, with an illness the opposite of that of Sacas.[9]
For he, not being a citizen, is forcing his way in,
While we, dignified by tribe and lineage,
Citizens among citizens, and on account of no scarecrow,
Have flown up and away from the fatherland with both feet:
Not because we hate that city herself,
As one which is not by nature great, and happy,
And a community for all—to spend their money, in fines and settlements!
For while the cicadas for a month or two only
Sing upon the branches, the Athenians *always*
Upon the lawsuits sing—their entire lives away!
That is why we are treading this path,
Carrying basket and pot and myrtle boughs,[10]
Wandering in search of a spot without busy troubles,
Where, having settled, we may dwell.
And our goal is Tereus,

7. An idiom equivalent to our modern "go to the dogs."

8. Again, Euelpides breaks the dramatic illusion to address the audience.

9. "Sacas" means "the Scythian," and was applied to the tragedian Acestor, a naturalized Athenian who apparently had some trouble with his citizenship (cf. *Wasps* 1221).

10. Implements for the sacrifice required at the founding of a new city.

The hoopoe, from whom we need to inquire
If he knows of some such city that he has flown over.

PEISTHETAIROS: Here!

EUELPIDES: What is it?

PEISTHETAIROS: The crow, once again,
Points upward!

EUELPIDES: And this jackdaw
Gapes up, as if showing me something;
It *must* be that there are birds here,
And we'll know at once, if we make a noise.

PEISTHETAIROS: But do you know what to do? Strike the rock with your leg![11]

EUELPIDES: Why don't you do it with your head, so as to make twice the noise!

PEISTHETAIROS: Look, take a stone and knock.

EUELPIDES: Sure, if so it's decided![12] Boy! Boy!

PEISTHETAIROS: What's this you're saying? You're calling the hoopoe "boy"?! Shouldn't you call, instead of "boy"—"hoo-po-e"?

EUELPIDES: Hoo-po-e! . . . You'll make me knock again. Hoo-po-e!

BIRD-SERVANT OF THE HOOPOE BIRD: Who are these? Who's the one shouting for the master?

EUELPIDES: Apollo shield us from this gaping beak!

SERVANT: Woe of woes! These two are bird hunters!

EUELPIDES: Isn't it terrible?! Not to speak more beautifully!

SERVANT: You two shall perish!

EUELPIDES: But we two are not humans!

SERVANT: What!?

EUELPIDES: I at any rate am a very frightened Libyan bird![13]

SERVANT: Nonsense!

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11. There was a boys' saying: "Strike a rock with your leg and birds will fall down."
12. The formula for something passed by vote in the Assembly.
13. These birds were considered especially prone to defecate when frightened.

EUELPIDES: Well, just look at the stuff at my feet!

SERVANT: And this fellow—what bird is he? Can't you say?

PEISTHETAIROS: I for my part am a shitting Pheasant!

EUELPIDES: But, in the name of the gods, whatever sort of beast are YOU?!

SERVANT: I, for my part, am a slave-bird.

EUELPIDES: Defeated by some fighting cock?

SERVANT: No; but when my master
Became a hoopoe, he then prayed that I might become
A bird, so that he might have a servant following him.

EUELPIDES: So a bird also needs some servant?

SERVANT: This one does, at any rate: I think because he was previously a human.
Sometimes he gets an erotic passion for eating Phalerian sardines;
So, I run after the sardines, taking a bowl.
He also desires soup, and he needs a ladle and a pot;
So, I run after the ladle.

EUELPIDES: (We have here a running-bird [sandpiper].)
So, running-bird, you know what you're to do? Call your master for us!

SERVANT: But, by Zeus, he is just now taking a nap,
Having gulped down myrtle and some fleas!

EUELPIDES: All the same, wake him up!

SERVANT: I know well that
He'll be irritated—but I'll wake him for your sake. [Exit.]

PEISTHETAIROS: May you perish in foul fashion, for you frightened me to death!

EUELPIDES: Alas! Unhappy am I! I let the jackdaw get away
In my terror!

PEISTHETAIROS: You most cowardly beast!
Out of terror you let the jackdaw go?!

EUELPIDES: Tell me,
Didn't you let go of the crow while you were shitting?

PEISTHETAIROS: By Zeus, not me!

EUELPIDES: So where is it?

PEISTHETAIROS: Flew away.

EUELPIDES: You didn't let it go? Oh-ho, good fellow, what a MAN you are!

TEREUS [having become a Hoopoe Bird]: Open the wood,[14] so that I may then go out!

EUELPIDES: Heracles! What ever is *this* beast?
What is this plumage? What is the fashion of this triple-cresting?

HOOPOE: Who are they who seek *me*?

EUELPIDES: It looks like the twelve gods[15] have afflicted you!

HOOPOE: You two mock me, seeing the plumage?! Strangers, *I was* a human!

EUELPIDES: We aren't laughing at *you*!

HOOPOE: Then at what?!

EUELPIDES: It's your beak: that's what appears ridiculous to us.

HOOPOE: It is in such ways that Sophocles abuses me, 100
In his tragedies about Tereus!

EUELPIDES: YOU are Tereus?! Are you a bird, or a peacock?[16]

HOOPOE: I am a bird!

EUELPIDES: So then where are your feathers?

HOOPOE: They fell out.

EUELPIDES: On account of some illness?

HOOPOE: No, but in the winter, all birds
Molt; and then we grow other feathers again.
But tell me, who *you two* are.

EUELPIDES: Us two? Mortals.

HOOPOE: Of what stock?

EUELPIDES: From where there are the beautiful triremes.

HOOPOE: So you are jurymen?

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14. There is a play here on the words for "wood" (*hylē*) and "gate" (*pylē*).
15. The twelve Olympians; a proverbial expression for terrible misfortune.
16. Used metaphorically for a ridiculous dandy (*Acharnians* 63).

EUELPIDES: Rather the contrary, NON-jurymen.

HOOPOE: Does such a seed get sown *there*?

EUELPIDES: If you search a bit you could get some from the countryside.[17]

HOOPOE: Out of need of what business do you two come here?

EUELPIDES: We wish to meet you.

HOOPOE: About what?

EUELPIDES: Because first, you were human, as we two are now,
And you owed money, as we two do now,
And you weren't pleased to pay it back, as we two aren't now;
And then subsequently you have taken on the nature of birds,
And have circled in flight above land and sea,
And are prudent in all things that pertain to human or bird;
With these things in view, therefore, we two come now to you, as
Suppliants, that you might point out to us some fleecy city,
In which we might lie down, like some soft goat's-hair cloak.

HOOPOE: So then you seek a city greater than that of the Cranaeans?[18]

EUELPIDES: Not greater, but more suitable for us two.

HOOPOE: So, obviously you are looking for an aristocracy.

EUELPIDES: ME?!
Least of all! I loathe the son of Scellius![19]

HOOPOE: Then in what sort of city would you most pleasantly dwell?

EUELPIDES: Where the most troubling business would be of the following sort:
To my door, early in the morning, one of my friends would come,
Saying: "In the name of Olympian Zeus!
You and your children, having festively bathed yourselves,
Come early tomorrow to my place: for I am going to put on a wedding

17. The implication is that rural Athenians were less likely to spend time on juries.

18. Cranaus was one of the first mythic kings of Athens; when he ruled, the Athenians called themselves Cranaeans, and the city Cranae; from his daughter, Atthis, the land got its name Attica.

19. Aristocrates, son of Scellius, became a leader in the oligarchic regime that ruled Athens for a short while in 411 B.C., three years after the *Birds* was first produced.

Feast; now don't do anything else! If you don't come,
Then don't ever come to me at a time when I am faring *badly*!"

HOOPOE: By Zeus, you *do* have an erotic passion for affairs of misery!
And you?

PEISTHETAIROS: I too have an erotic passion for such things.

HOOPOE: For which?

PEISTHETAIROS: Where a father, having encountered me, blames me in regards to
His blooming son, as if he's suffered an injustice, in the following
Terms: "A fine thing it is—you showoff!—when you encountered my
Son, coming away from the gymnasium, freshly bathed:
And you failed to kiss him, to speak with him, to put the make on
Him, to fondle his balls—you! who have been my ancestral friend!"

HOOPOE: Ah, you poor fellow! What ills you *do* have an erotic passion for!
But there is a city happy in the way you two say—
On the coast of the Red Sea![20]

EUELPIDES: Egad, no! NOT on the sea coast, where the "Salaminia"[21] will show up,
Some early morning, carrying a herald!
Can't you point out to us some Greek city?

HOOPOE: Why don't you go dwell in Elis, at Lepreum?

EUELPIDES: Because, by the gods, though I haven't seen it,
I loathe "Lepreum," on account of Melanthius![22]

HOOPOE: But there are others—the Opuntians in Locris—
Among whom you ought to settle.

EUELPIDES: But I at any rate would never become an Opuntius,[23]
Even for a mass of gold!
But, what's it like living with the birds?—
For you know with precision.

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20. Equivalent to our "over the rainbow" (see also *Knights* 1088).
21. The ship the city sent out to catch those fleeing indictments.
22. A tragic poet who suffered from leprosy [*lepra*]; referred to also at *Peace* 1009.
23. A one-eyed fellow (see 1294 below) and a sycophant.

HOOPOE: It's not unpleasing, as time passes.
In the first place, you need to live without a purse.

EUELPIDES: That does away with a great deal of the dishonesty in life!

HOOPOE: And we graze the gardens for white sesame,
And myrtle, and poppy seeds, and mint.

EUELPIDES: So then you live the life of newlyweds![24]

PEISTHETAIROS: Whoa! Whoa! I have a great insight into a project for the race of birds,
And the power that would come about, if you would be persuaded by me!

HOOPOE: Persuaded by you in what?

PEISTHETAIROS: In *what* should you be persuaded?—First,
Don't fly around everywhere gaping!
For this is a dishonorable business. Among us,
If you were to ask about those who flit around,
"Who's this?" Teleas[25] will say as follows:
"The human's a bird—weightless, flighty,
Wavering, never staying put in any way."

HOOPOE: By Dionysus, in these respects your blame is on target!
So what *should* we do?

PEISTHETAIROS: Dwell in a *single city.*

HOOPOE: What sort of a *city* could we dwell in as *birds*?!

PEISTHETAIROS: Truly, "you have pronounced the most stupid utterance"[26]—
Look down below!

HOOPOE: I'm looking.

PEISTHETAIROS: Now look up!

HOOPOE: I'm looking.

PEISTHETAIROS: Turn your neck!

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24. A cake containing the preceding ingredients was traditionally eaten by newlyweds.

25. Thought to be a wealthy political figure; also satirized in fragments of the comic poets Phrynicus and Plato; see also 1024–25 and *Peace* 1009. The joke of referring to him in this context has been lost.

26. A spoofing quotation or echo of some unknown tragic verse. For comic effect, Aristophanes mimics tragic diction as well as tragic scenes.

HOOPOE: By Zeus,
I'll have enjoyment for sure, if I wrench my neck!

PEISTHETAIROS: Do you see anything?

HOOPOE: The clouds and the heaven.

PEISTHETAIROS: Well, is not this the vault [*polos*] of the birds?!

HOOPOE: "*Polos*?"—In what sense? 180

PEISTHETAIROS: Even as if someone would say "place."
Because this "moves about" [*poletai*], and everything
Proceeds on account of this, it is now called "*polos*."
But if once you were to settle and fortify this,
From being called "*polos*," it would become "*polis* [city]!"
And the result would be, that you would rule over humans as [you do] over locusts,
And the very gods you would destroy, with a Melian famine![27]

HOOPOE: How?

PEISTHETAIROS: Surely, the air is in between, in relation to the earth:
And so, even as, when *we* wish to go to the Pythia [Delphic oracle],
We have to request passage of the Boeotians, 190
In the same way, when humans sacrifice to the gods,
If the gods do not bring tribute to *you*,
Then through the polis that does not belong to them, and the void,
You will not let the savor of the thigh meat through!

HOOPOE: Hey! Wow! By Earth, by snares, by "Clouds,"[28] by nets!
Never have I heard so elegant a conceit!
So I would indeed found with you the city,
If the other birds agree!

PEISTHETAIROS: So who will explain the affair to them?

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27. A dual reference: 1) to the famous Athenian reduction of Melos by siege and starvation (see Thucydides 5.89–116), which occurred about a year before this play was first produced; and 2) also to philosophic atheism—Socrates is called "the Melian" in *Clouds* 830 because he is associated with the notorious atheistic philosopher "Diagoras the Melian" (referred to below at 1073); and in the *Clouds*, Socrates and his students are portrayed as starving ascetics.

28. "Cloud" was a term for a fine bird net; see also 528; but this is also one of many echoes of the *Clouds*.

Hoopoe: You! For I have taught them, who were previously barbarians,
To speak—having spent a lot of time with them.

Peisthetairos: How do you call them together?

Hoopoe: Easily; for as soon as I step into the thicket here,
And then wake up my nightingale,
She and I will call them. And they, if they
Hear our two voices, will come running!

Peisthetairos: Oh you dearest of birds! Now don't you delay!
But I beseech you, as quickly as possible
Go into the thicket and wake up the nightingale!

Hoopoe: Come, my mate, leave off sleeping,
And let loose the tunes of the sacred hymns,
By which you lament through your divine mouth
The much bewailed Itys, my [child] and yours—
Warbling with flowing songs
From your trilling mouth!
The pure echo proceeds, through the leafy
Yew, to the seats of Zeus,
Where golden-haired Phoebus [Apollo] hears;
And, in response to your elegies, plucks
Upon an ivory harp, to set in motion
The choruses of the gods! And from the immortal
Mouth there issues a divine resonance,
A cry of the blessed ones!

[A song is heard.]

Peisthetairos [or **Euelpides**][29]: King Zeus! What a voice the bird has!—
Such as to pour honey over the entire thicket!

Euelpides [or **Peisthetairos**]: Here he is!

Peisthetairos [or **Euelpides**]: What?

Euelpides [or **Peisthetairos**]: Won't you shut up?!

Peisthetairos [or **Euelpides**]: What's the matter?

29. The attribution of the lines here is disputed: the earliest printed edition has the attributions indicated in brackets, against the more authoritative manuscripts that we now have.

EUELPIDES [or **PEISTHETAIROS**]: The hoopoe is preparing to sing again!

HOOPOE: Epopoi! Popopopopopopoi!
Ahoi! Ahoi! Come, come, come, come!
Come here, who is of my feathered race!
As many of you as upon the well-sown country fields
Feed—ten thousand tribes of barley-eaters,
And races of seed-pickers,
Swift of flight, soft of voice;
As many of you as frequently twitter around the furrow's clod,
So light, in your pleasing voice.
Tio! Tio! Tio! Tio! Tio! Tio! Tio! Tio!
And you who upon the ivy shoots in gardens
Have your grazing,
And who upon the mountains eat wild olive berries,
And arbutus—
Complete your flight to my voice!
Trioto! Trioto! Totobrix!
You who seize the sharp-biting fleas near the marshy glens,
And as many as possess
The dewy places of the earth
And the broad plain of Marathon:
The motley-plumed bird—
The Moorhen! The Moorhen!
Let the tribes flying on the salty swell of the sea,
With the Halcyons,
Come hither to learn new things!
For we are here gathering all tribes
Of the birds with outstretched necks!
For a certain sharp elder[30] has arrived,
Of strange judgment,
Who is taking in hand strange deeds!
But come, everyone, to the discussions—
Hither, hither, hither, hither!

30. The word translated as "elder" (*presbus*) can also mean "wren."

Chorus of the Birds: Torotorotorotorotorotix!
Kikkabaw! kikkabaw!
Torotorotorotorolililiix!

Peisthetairos: Do you see any bird?

Euelpides: By Apollo! Not I!—
Yet I've looked up gaping into heaven!

Peisthetairos: In vain, then, it looks like the Hoopoe went into the thicket,
And clucked in imitation of the Lapwing![31]

A certain bird: Torotix! Torotix!

Peisthetairos: But my good fellow, here's one bird coming now!

Euelpides: By Zeus, a bird indeed! What in the world sort? Surely not a Peacock!

Peisthetairos: This one here will himself explain to us: What IS this bird?

Hoopoe: This is not one of the usual things you always see,
But, rather, a water bird.

Euelpides: Wow! Beautiful and purple!

Hoopoe: But of course: and its name is in fact "Purple-feathered."

Euelpides: Hey, psst, you there!

Peisthetairos: Why are you yelling?

Euelpides: Here is another bird!

Peisthetairos: By Zeus, another indeed, and "this one in a land that is not its place!"[32]
Whatever is this out-of-place, mountain-treading "prophet-of-Muses?"[33]

Hoopoe: "Mede" is the name of this one.

Peisthetairos: "Mede?!" Lord Heracles!
Then how, being a Mede, did it fly here without a camel?

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31. A bird that, in order to decoy enemies, flies far from its nest and pretends to call its young to it.

32. A spoofing quote from Sophocles' lost tragedy *Tyro*.

33. A spoofing quote from Aeschylus's lost tragedy *Edonians*.

EUELPIDES: Here is yet another bird, with a crest.

PEISTHETAIROS: What's this prodigy?! So you're NOT the only hoopoe, but this is another?! 280

HOOPOE: This one is the son of Philocles the Hoopoe,[34]
And I'm his grandfather—even as you would say,
"Hipponicus the son of Callias," and "Callias son of Hipponicus."[35]

PEISTHETAIROS: So this bird is Callias?!—Look! He's shedding!

EUELPIDES: Yes, for since he is well born, he is plucked by the sycophants,
And the females as well come to pluck his feathers.

PEISTHETAIROS: Oh Poseidon!—what is this next dyed bird!
What ever is the name of this one?!

HOOPOE: This one is "Glutton."

PEISTHETAIROS: Is there another glutton besides Cleonymus?

EUELPIDES: How could he be Cleonymus, when he hasn't thrown away his crest?![36] 290

PEISTHETAIROS: But why all this crest business among the birds?
Are they going to run the double-course [armored] race?

HOOPOE: It's like the Carians, my good man,
Who live on their mountain crests for security reasons.

PEISTHETAIROS: By Poseidon! Don't you see how much mischief is implied in the
Birds' drawing around together?

EUELPIDES: Lord Apollo! What a cloud! Alas!
It is no longer possible to discern the *exits*[37] on account of them flying in!

PEISTHETAIROS: Here is a Partridge!

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34. Philocles, whose nickname was apparently "Lark" (see 1295) was a tragedian who had also (like Sophocles) written a tragedy about Tereus.

35. A very wealthy and prominent Athenian, who figures in the Socratic writings of Xenophon and Plato.

36. A favorite butt of Aristophanes (*Acharnians* 88; *Knights* 958; *Wasps* 19; *Clouds* 353), who is referred to as a notorious coward and glutton, who threw away his shield at the battle of Delium; see also 1475. The joke turns on the two meanings of *lophos*, "crest of feathers on a bird" and "crest of horsehair on a war helmet."

37. Once again, Euelpides comically breaks the dramatic illusion.

EUELPIDES: And those, by Zeus, are Moorhens!

PEISTHETAIROS: And here's a Widgeon!

EUELPIDES: And there's a Halcyon!
What's this behind her?

PEISTHETAIROS: This? A Clipper.

EUELPIDES: Is a "Clipper" a bird?

PEISTHETAIROS: Well, isn't Sporgilus?[38]—and here's an owl.

EUELPIDES: What are you saying?! Who brought an owl here to Athens!?[39]

HOOPOE: Jay, Turtledove, Lark, Sedgebird, Thyme-finch, Ring-cove,
Rock-dove, Stock-dove, Cuckoo, Falcon, Fiery-crest, Willow-hen,
Lammergeyer, Porphyrion, Kestrel, Waxwing, Nuthatch, Water-hen.

PEISTHETAIROS: Egad! The birds! Double egad! The Blackbirds!
How they twitter, and run about shrieking!
Are they then threatening us? Alas! Their beaks are gaping
And they are staring at you and me!

EUELPIDES: That's how it seems to me too!

CHORUS: Popopopopopopopopopoi!
WHOoooooooo then has summoned me?
In what place does he browse?

HOOPOE: Here I am, as of old, never far from my friends!

CHORUS: What? What? What-What-What-What-What-What?—
What speech then do you have to please me?

HOOPOE: One that is in common, and safe, and just, and pleasant, and
beneficial!
For a pair who are subtle men of reason have arrived at my place here!

CHORUS: Where? How? What do you mean?

HOOPOE: I am saying that two old men have arrived here from humans!
And they come having the root of a prodigious affair!

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38. Apparently a well-known barber in Athens.

39. The owl was the sacred bird of Athena, and hence a proverb about bringing them to Athens, equivalent to "carrying coals to Newcastle." Once again Euelpides comically breaks the dramatic illusion.

Chorus Leader: Oh you greatest sinner of all my entire days!
What *are* you saying?!

Hoopoe: Now, now, don't be afraid of speech!

Chorus Leader: *What* have you done to me?

Hoopoe: I've welcomed two men, erotically passionate for intercourse with us!

Chorus Leader: Have you really done this deed?!

Hoopoe: And I am pleased to have done it!

Chorus Leader: And are the two now somewhere among us?!

Hoopoe: If I am among you!

Chorus: Ai Yi Yi! We are betrayed and suffer impious injuries!
He who was a friend and nourished together with us,
Who browsed the fields with us,
Has overstepped ancient laws,
Has overstepped the oaths of birds!
He summoned us into a trap, and has thrown me to
That impious species, which has, since the time it was born,
Against me waged war!
But we'll settle the account with this fellow later!
It is my judgment that these two old men will pay the just penalty
And be torn to pieces by us!

Peisthetairos: So we are destroyed then!

Euelpides: You alone are to blame for these evils that now befall us!
For why did you draw me hither?!

Peisthetairos: So that you would follow me!

Euelpides: Sure, so that I would weep to the utmost!

Peisthetairos: In this you are an extreme babbler!
For how will you weep—once you have had your eyes gouged out?!

Chorus: Hey! Hey!
Attack! Charge! Bear down with hostile,
Bloody assault, throw wings all around them,
And surround them!
For the two must both scream

And supply food for the beak!
For there does not exist a shady mountain, or ethereal cloud,
Or hoary sea that shall be a
Refuge of these two fleeing me!
But we will now not hesitate to pluck and to bite these two!
Where is the rank commander? Let him lead, on the right flank!

EUELPIDES: This is it! Where shall I flee in my wretchedness?

PEISTHETAIROS: Stand, won't you fellow?!

EUELPIDES: To be torn to pieces by these?!

PEISTHETAIROS: But how do you think you'll run away from 'em?!

EUELPIDES: I don't know how!

PEISTHETAIROS: But I am telling you,
We must make a stand, and fight, using the pots!

EUELPIDES: How are *pots* going to help us two?

PEISTHETAIROS: An owl will then never come near the two of us![40]

EUELPIDES: But what about these with the talons here?

PEISTHETAIROS: Snatch up a spit,
And then plant it before you!

EUELPIDES: What about these eyes of mine?

PEISTHETAIROS: Grab a vinegar cruet and hold it before them! Or a saucer!

EUELPIDES: Oh wisest one! You figured that out well, and like a general!
You outshoot Nicias[41] with your devices!

CHORUS: Hey! Hey! Hey! Advance with your beaks poised! No hesitations!
Draw! Pluck! Strike! Tear! First break the pot!

HOOPOE: Tell me, you worst of all beasts, why are you about to
Destroy these two men from whom you have suffered nothing,
And to slay these who are kin and tribesmen of my wife?![42]

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40. Pots are frightening to birds because birds are cooked in them. Pots were understood to be under Athena's protection, as products of her inspiration of art and craft. Cf. *Acharnians* 284.

41. The famous Athenian general, who had won a victory (which proved to be short-lived) at Syracuse the autumn before the play was first presented (Thucydides 6.63–71).

42. Procne the wife of Tereus was of the ancient Athenian royal house before the gods transformed her into a bird along with her husband.

Chorus Leader: Are we to spare these any more than wolves?!
Whom would we punish who are more hostile than these?

Hoopoe: But what if, while in nature they are hostile, in mind they are friendly,
And have come hither to teach you something useful?

Chorus Leader: But how could these ever teach or communicate to us
Something useful—they who were enemies to our grandsires?

Hoopoe: But from enemies surely the wise learn many things.
For caution saves all things. From a friend,
You would not learn this; but an enemy compels you to do so at once.
Again, it is from men who are enemies, not friends, that cities learn
To labor at building high walls, and to acquire great ships;
And this sort of learning saves children, home, and property.

Chorus Leader: It is indeed useful, it seems to me, to hear first the speeches;
For one might learn something wise even from enemies.

Peisthetairos: They are slackening the bridle of their rage. Move rearwards.

Hoopoe: And it is just; and you all ought to accord gratitude to me.

Chorus: But we have not ever before opposed you in any other matter.

Peisthetairos: They rather make peace, by Zeus! So let down the pot,
And the saucer.
But the spear—the spit—we must
Keep as we walk around,
Inside the weapons, looking out
Over the top rim of the pot.
For we two must not flee!

Euelpides: But really, if we should die,
Where in the earth will we be buried?

Peisthetairos: The Cerameicus[43] will receive us.
For in order that we will receive public burial,

43. A suburb of Athens where was situated the cemetery for veterans who died in battle; also the potters' quarter in Athens.

We will declare to the generals
That we two died fighting the enemies
In Orneae.[44]

CHORUS LEADER: Fall back in ranks again to the same place,
And, bending, let down your spiritedness, next to your anger,
Like a hoplite![45]
And we will inquire from these the while who they might be, and
From whence they came,
And with what thought in mind.
Ahoy! Hoopoe, I call you!

HOOPOE: Do you call, in a mood to listen?

CHORUS LEADER: Who ever are these, and from whence?

HOOPOE: A pair of strangers, from wise Greece.

CHORUS LEADER: What fortune
Ever brings the pair
To come to the birds?

HOOPOE: An erotic passion for the way of life,
And for dwelling among you,
And having every sort of intercourse among you.

CHORUS LEADER: What are you saying? What speeches have they to say?

HOOPOE: Incredible and wild to hear.

CHORUS LEADER: Does he see some gain worth abiding here for,
Which he believes that he would make by being with me,
And by which he would overpower an enemy, or
Be able to benefit friends?

HOOPOE: He speaks of a great prosperity—
Unutterable and incredible!—he incites,
Saying how all things are yours,

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44. A very ancient town in Argolis, whose name sounds like the Greek word for "bird" (*ornis*). In the year before the play was first presented, the town was taken by Sparta and then besieged, taken, and razed by Athens and her allies: there was no battle, and no one died, because the defenders slipped away.

45. There is here a parody of a standard hoplite maneuver.

What is here, and what is there, and
What is over there!

Chorus Leader: So he's crazy?

Hoopoe: Unspeakably prudent!

Chorus Leader: There's wisdom in his mind?

Hoopoe: The sharpest fox, 430
Sophist-like, a swindler, a trickster, thoroughly subtle.[46]

Chorus Leader: Bid him speak, speak to me!
For after hearing the things you say to me
I'm aflutter at the words!

Hoopoe: Come then, you! and you!—This weaponry
Hang back up again, with good fortune,
By the oven corner inside, near the trivet.
And you, as regards those speeches, concerning which I issued the
Summons, teach and expound to these.

Peisthetairos: By Apollo, I will not!—
Unless they contract with me the very covenant which 440
That ape—the swordmaker[47]—contracted with his wife: that these
Are neither to bite me, nor to yank my balls, nor to poke me in my—

Euelpides: You don't mean—

Peisthetairos: Not at all, no!—I'm speaking of the *eyes*.

Chorus Leader: I make the covenant.

Peisthetairos: Now swear these things to me!

Chorus Leader: I swear—but on the following conditions: that I'm judged
Victorious, by all the judges and all the spectators![48]

Peisthetairos: So it shall be!

Chorus: *And*, if I do breech the covenant, then I'm victorious if by only a
single judge's vote!

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46. The terms for "trickster" and "subtle" recall the qualities that Socrates promises to educate Strepsiades in (*Clouds* 260).

47. A reference to a certain Panetius, who was short and ugly.

48. Here the chorus comically breaks the dramatic illusion.

Herald: Listen to the people! The hoplites are now
To withdraw back homeward taking their weapons,
And are to watch to see what we post, in writing, on the bulletin boards!

Chorus: Guileful always in every way
Is the human by nature. But still, speak to me.
For probably you may happen to express
Something worthy that you see in me; or
Some greater power,
Overlooked by my un-clever mind.
But speak to the community about what you have seen.
For whatever good you might happen
To provide for me, this will be shared in common with you.
Whatever business it is that you have come to persuade us of your knowledge of,
Speak it out boldly. For we will not be the first to violate the treaty.

Peisthetairos: Now I am impassioned, by Zeus! And a speech is fermenting within me,
That I will not be stopped from kneading. Come, boy, the crowning
Wreath! Let someone quickly bring water to pour over my hands!

Euelpides: (Are we going to feast? or what?)[49]

Peisthetairos: (By Zeus, no! I seek to speak some great, old, and fatted word,
Such as will break down the soul of these!) How I *do* feel pain
For you all! Who once were kings—

Chorus: US! Kings?! Over *what*?

Peisthetairos: YOU were kings, of all that is—of me in the first place, and of this
Fellow, and of Zeus Himself! More ancient than, and first before, Kronos and Titans,
Did you come into being!—and before Earth as well!

birds were kings first

49. A wreath of myrtle was worn by an orator as he spoke; the wreath was also worn at banquets. Hands were washed before dining, but also before any solemn affair.

Chorus: Earth as well?

Peisthetairos: Yes, by Apollo!

Chorus: Now this, by Zeus, I had never learned!

Peisthetairos: That's because you are by nature unlearned and overly busy, and
Have not pondered Aesop: Who declares
In speech that a bird, the crested lark, came into being first of all,
Prior to Earth—and then her father fell ill, and died;
And since Earth did not exist, his corpse laid out for five days; and that she, at a loss,
And lacking devices, finally buried her father in her head!

Euelpides: (So then the father of the crested lark lies dead in the "Head-land?!"[50])

Peisthetairos: Now, are not those who came into being prior to Earth, and prior to gods,
Since they are themselves eldest, correctly possessed of the kingship?

Euelpides: By Apollo! You had better tend your beak from now on!
Zeus won't quickly surrender His scepter to an oak-pecker!

Peisthetairos: For, that of old it was *not* the *gods* who ruled over humans,
But the *birds*, as monarchs, there is here much evidence.
First, I point out to you the rooster, and how he tyrannized
And ruled over the Persians, before all those Dariuses and Megabazuses,
So that he is still called the "Persian bird" on account of that rule.[51]

Euelpides: (So that's why even now, like the great king,[52] he struts about
And alone of the birds carries on his head the erect tiara!)

Peisthetairos: So mighty and very great was he once, that even now,
On account of his strength at that time, when he merely sings the Dawn, everybody jumps up to their work—in bronze, in pottery, in tannery,

50. "Head," *Kephalē*, was an Attic district or *deme* where was situated a large cemetery.
51. Roosters, originating in India, were originally bought from Persian merchants.
52. I.e., the Persian emperor.

In shoemaking, as bath-attendant, as grain traders, in lyre and shield
construction on the lathe;
While it's still night they run, putting on their sandals.

EUELPIDES: Just ask me!
For I lost my cloak of Phrygian wool on account of this, to that wicked
Fellow! For once, when I was invited to a child's tenth-day celebration[53]
in the city, I drank too much,
And then went to sleep; and before the others had feasted, this one
crowed;
And I, supposing it was dawn, headed for Halimus;[54] and, just as I
Am stooping outside the wall, a robber hits me on the back with a
Club! And I fall, and am about to cry out, but he's plucked off my cloak!

PEISTHETAIROS: And the kite then ruled as king over the Greeks!

500 **CHORUS:** Over the Greeks?!

PEISTHETAIROS: And that one, when he was first our king,
Taught us to go down on our knees before kites.[55]

EUELPIDES: (By Dionysus, for my part
I certainly got down on my knees when I saw a kite—and then, gaping
Upward, I swallowed an obol![56] . . . And I dragged home an empty purse.)

PEISTHETAIROS: And the cuckoo was king over Egypt and all of Phoenicia;
And when the cuckoo said "cuckoo!" it was then that all the
Phoenicians harvested the wheat and barley, in their fields.[57]

EUELPIDES: (So that's why the proverb is truly spoken: "Cuckoo! To the fields, with stiff peckers!")

PEISTHETAIROS: And such a rule did they exercise, that if someone ruled as king

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53. Children were named in a celebration on the tenth day after birth.

54. A district or *deme* about four miles outside of Athens; apparently a home of Euelpides, who is thus identified as a rural character (see also 585 and 645—where Euelpides is said to come from another rural *deme*).

55. The kite reappeared in Greece each year as a harbinger of Spring, and the Greeks therefore went down on their knees at the sight of one at that time of year.

56. Lacking pockets in their cloaks, Greeks often carried small coins in their mouths.

57. To understand the following response of Euelpides: the word "barley" means in slang an erect phallus (after the shape and appearance of the stalk), and the word "field," associated with "plowing," means a woman's genitals.

In the cities of the Greeks—an Agamemnon or a Menelaus—
A bird used to perch on their scepters, to partake of whatever gifts they received!

EUELPIDES: (This I did not know! And indeed I've been struck with amazement,
Whenever, in the tragedies, some Priam has come out, with a bird;
It must be that the latter perches there to watch out for what gifts Lysicrates[58] received!)

PEISTHETAIROS: And, what is most awesome of all, Zeus, the present king,
Stands having the eagle-bird perched on His head as emblem of kingship;
And His daughter, again, has an owl; and Apollo, being a servant, has a falcon!

EUELPIDES: By Demeter! You speak these things well! But what's the point of their having these?

PEISTHETAIROS: In order that, when someone is sacrificing, and puts into the hand of the gods, according to law,
The innards, *these* may take the innards, *before* Zeus does!
Besides, no human used to swear by a god, but all swore by birds.
And Lampon still now swears by the goose, whenever he practices a deception.[59]
SO: everyone previously believed *you* to be great and hallowed,
But now—slaves, simpletons, nobodies![60]
Now, as if you were insane,
They pelt you; and in the temples,
Everyone is a bird-catcher of you,
Setting up nooses, traps, sticks,
Snares, "clouds," nets, cages;
And when they take you, they sell you in flocks;
And those who buy you feel you up!
And they don't stop, if they feel like doing it,
At cooking and serving you up.

58. A notoriously corrupt general, according to the scholia.

59. Lampon was a prominent authority on oracles and religious ritual; the word for "goose," *chēna*, differs by only one letter from the word for Zeus, *zēna*.

60. Literally, "Maneses"—a common name for a slave.

But they grate cheese, add oil,
Silphium, and vinegar, and, whipping up
A sauce that is sweet and oily,
They then pour this, heated,
Over you—
As if you were so much carrion!

Chorus: Far, far the harshest of accounts[61]
Have you brought, Oh human! How I weep
At the vice of my fathers, who,
Having such honors as these handed down from their ancestors,
Squandered them for me!
But you, in accordance with a divinity and a good, lucky coincidence,
Have come to me as a savior!
For I will live having offered up to you
My nestlings and myself!

Chorus Leader: But whatever it is that ought to be done, you stay and teach: for we hold life
Not worth living, if we do not obtain our kingship in every respect!

Peisthetairos: Now, my teaching is that, in the first place, there is to be a single city of the birds,
And then, that all the air around, and this entire middle part,
Is to be surrounded with a wall made of great baked bricks, like Babylon.

Euelpides: Oh Cebrione and Porphyrion![62] How terrible is this city fortification!

Peisthetairos: And then, when this has been set up, demand back the rule from Zeus!
And if he refuses, and is unwilling, and fails to submit immediately,
A Holy War proclaim against Him, and forbid the gods
From traversing your territory with erections,
As they have in the past, descending for adulteries with their Alcmenes,

61. This line looks like a parody of line 442 of Euripides' tragedy *Alcestis*.

62. Two of the Giants who were leaders in the war with the Olympian gods; porphyrion is also the name of a water fowl—see lines 707, 882. At line 1249, Peisthetairos tells Iris that he will send six hundred porphyriones through the air to attack Zeus if Zeus troubles him further.

And Alopes, and Semeles.[63] And if they do try to traverse, you'll clap a seal around
Their erections, rendering them unable to fuck the girls in the future!
And to humans, I urge that another bird be sent as herald, with the word that,
From here on, they are to sacrifice to birds, since the birds are the kings,
And to gods only afterwards. And they are to apportion in a fitting way
Birds to the gods, whichever bird is most in accord with each:
If it is to Aphrodite that one is going to sacrifice, then sacrifice barley grains[64] to the "*Phall*-eris" bird;
If one is going to sacrifice a sheep to Poseidon, let him consecrate wheat grains to a duck;
If one is going to sacrifice something to Heracles, let him sacrifice kneaded honey cakes to a gull;[65]
And, if one is going to sacrifice a ram to Zeus the king, let the king be the kinglet-wren,[66]
To whom one must, prior to Zeus Himself, slaughter an ant—equipped with balls!

EUELPIDES: I get a kick out of that slaughtered ant: Thunder away, Oh great Zan![67]

CHORUS: And how will humans ever believe us to be gods, and not jackdaws—
We who fly and have wings?

PEISTHETAIROS: You're driveling! By Zeus, Hermes at any rate,
Being a god, flies and has wings!—As do very many other gods!

63. Mortal women: Alcmene and Semele had intercourse with Zeus and bore, respectively, the hero Heracles and the god Dionysus; Alope bore the hero Hippothoon to Poseidon.

64. Slang for the erect phallus. It is enough in the following lines to note the comic links between bird and god; the additional wordplay is difficult to follow.

65. The gull was proverbially voracious, as was Heracles, in comedy. See 1583–90 and 1685–92 and *Frogs* 62.

66. The name used for this bird is obscure and has the same root as the slang term for testicles used in the next line; there seems to be here a reference to a fable in Aesop where the wren becomes king of the birds by the test of which can fly higher: when the eagle appeared at first to win by soaring to its maximum height, the clever wren, who had hidden in the eagle's feathers, took off and soared even higher.

67. Euelpides uses the Doric word for "Zeus."

Victory, for instance, flies with golden wings! And also Eros, by Zeus!
And Homer says that Iris resembles "a timorous wild pigeon."[68]

Euelpides: But won't Zeus thunder, and send winged lightning down on us?!

Peisthetairos: And if they still, out of ignorance, believe you to be nothing,
And the gods to be these who are on Olympus, then it will be necessary for a united cloud of sparrows,
And seed-pluckers, to gobble up their seeds from the fields;
And then let Demeter measure out grain to them in their starvation!

Euelpides: By Zeus, She won't be willing, but you'll see her coming up with excuses!

Peisthetairos: And again: the crows shall pluck out the eyes of the oxen, with
Which they plough the earth, and of their sheep—as proof of your power!
And then let Apollo, who is the Healer, heal them; and earn his fee!

Euelpides: No!—not until I've sold my own two little oxen!

Peisthetairos: But: If they hold YOU to be God, you Life, you Earth, you Kronos, you Poseidon,
Every good thing shall be theirs!

Chorus Leader [or **Hoopoe**][69]: Tell me one of the good things.

Peisthetairos: First, the locusts will not eat up their grape-flowers,
But instead, a single regiment of owls and kestrels will bear down upon the locusts!
And then, the bugs and mites will not always eat up the figs,
But instead, a single flock of thrushes will pick the figs all clean!

Hoopoe: But from what source will we make them wealthy? For this is what especially their erotic passion is for!

Peisthetairos: When they come to seek divinatory advice, these will give to them mines of worth;

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68. In the Homeric *Hymn to Delian Apollo* 114.

69. The major manuscripts differ on the attribution of the lines here and as indicated in what follows.

And they will inform the seer about profitable voyages of trade,
So that no ship owner will be destroyed.

HOOPOE [or **CHORUS LEADER**]: How will none be destroyed?

PEISTHETAIROS: One of the birds will always warn the one seeking divinatory advice concerning the sailing:
"Now is not the time to sail, a storm is coming!"; "sail now, there'll be profit!"

EUELPIDES: I'm going to buy a merchant ship and become a ship owner! I'm not going to stay with you folks!

PEISTHETAIROS: And they will point out to them the treasures of money that people
Have previously buried. For these know. Everyone says: 600
"No one knows where my treasure is, unless it's a little birdy!"

EUELPIDES: I'm selling the merchant ship! I'm going to buy a shovel, and dig up the urns!

HOOPOE: But how will they give them health, which is in the lap of the gods?

PEISTHETAIROS: If they prosper, is this not great health? Know clearly,
That a human whose affairs are going badly is simply not one who's in good health!

CHORUS LEADER: But how will they ever make it to old age? For this is in the hands of Olympus—
Or must they die in childhood?

PEISTHETAIROS: By Zeus, No! But three hundred additional years will
The birds add to their lifespan!

CHORUS LEADER: From where?

PEISTHETAIROS: From where? From themselves!
Don't you know that "five human generations lives the cawing crow?"[70]

EUELPIDES: Wow! These are by far mightier kings for us than Zeus! 610

PEISTHETAIROS: For is it not so, by far?

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70. From a speech by the Nymphs, in a poem of Hesiod's of which we possess only a fragment containing this line, quoted by Plutarch (*On the Obsolescence of Oracles* 415c) to show that according to Hesiod even the Nymphs and other demigods are mortal.

First, no temple
Need we build for them, of stones,
Nor gated with golden gates,
But instead in thickets and small trees
They will dwell. And again, for the august among
The birds, the olive tree
Will be the temple! And neither to Delphi
Nor to Ammon will we go to
620 Sacrifice, but among the arbutus trees
And the wild olives we will stand, holding
Barley grains and wheat, praying to them
With outstretched hands
To give us a portion of the good things; and these things will
At once be given to us,
When we cast down a few wheat grains!

Chorus Leader: Oh you dearest one to me by far of elders, who has changed from being most hated!
It is not possible that I should ever again voluntarily depart from your judgment!

Chorus: Exulting at your words,
630 I threaten and I swear, that
If you, after having established with me
Words of like-minded agreement,
That are just, guileless, and pious,[71]
Go to confront the gods, united with me
In judgment, then, in not much time
The gods will no longer abuse my scepter!

Chorus Leader: But for whatever things it is necessary to do with strength, we are arrayed in order;
And for whatever things it is necessary to deliberate upon with judgment, all these are left up to you.

71. A traditional formula in treaties (cf. *Lysistrata* 168; Thucydides 4.18.3, 9).

HOOPOE: And now, by Zeus, it is no time for us to slumber any more,
Nor for Nicias-delay,[72]
But action must be as swift as possible. But first,
Come into my nest
Among my wool-bits and twigs here,
And tell us your names.

PEISTHETAIROS: But that's easy:
My name is Peisthetairos; and this fellow here
Is Euelpides of the Deme of Crioa.

HOOPOE: Well, welcome to you both!

PEISTHETAIROS: We accept your welcome.

HOOPOE: Come in here.

PEISTHETAIROS: Let's go . . . you lead us in.

HOOPOE: Come.

PEISTHETAIROS: Wait! Egad! Back water!
Look here, explain to us two, how I and this fellow will
Consort with you who are winged, when we are wingless?

HOOPOE: In a fine fashion.

PEISTHETAIROS: But look how, in the writings of Aesop,
Something is said about a fox, as to how
He once fared badly in a partnership with an eagle.[73]

HOOPOE: There's nothing to be afraid of: for there is a certain root,
Which if you chew will make you two winged.

PEISTHETAIROS: On this basis let's go in. Come, Xanthias
And Manodorus: bring the baggage.

CHORUS LEADER: Hey you! I'm calling you, I say, you!

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72. A word coined in reference to the delay Nicias as general advocated before, and exhibited during, the Sicilian expedition.

73. An eagle violated its friendship with a fox by helping its young to feed on the fox's cubs. Later, however, the eagle also suffers, for it ignites its nest with hot meat stolen from an altar; and the eaglets perish.

Hoopoe: What are you calling about?

Chorus Leader: You take these with you
To a good meal. But the sweet-voiced nightingale who sings with the Muses,
Send out and leave with us, so that we can fool around with her!

Peisthetairos: By Zeus, obey their request!
Send the little bird out from the flowering rush!

Euelpides: In the name of the gods, send her out here, so that
We two also may see the nightingale!

Hoopoe: But if that is what you two wish, it ought to be done.—Procne!
Come out and show yourself to the guests!

Peisthetairos: Oh much-honored Zeus! How beautiful is the little bird!
How soft! How white!

Euelpides: Then do you know how much
I would enjoy spreading her thighs?

Peisthetairos: How much gold she is wearing! Like a virgin!

Euelpides: I think I'd also like to kiss her!

Peisthetairos: But you ill-starred fool, she has a beak like two spits!

Euelpides: But, by Zeus, you have to peel the shell from her head, like an egg,
And then in that way kiss!

Hoopoe: Let's go!

Peisthetairos: You lead us two, with good fortune.

[Peisthetairos, Euelpides, and Tereus exit into the latter's nest.]

Chorus: Oh dear one, Oh tawny-throat!
Oh dearest of all birds,
Sharer in my songs,
Nightingale who is my fellow nursling!
You have come! You have come!—Displayed,
Bringing to me your sweet voice!
You, who elicit from the beautiful voice of
The flute the songs of spring—
Begin the anapests!

Chorus Leader: Come, ye men, who by nature live a life in darkness,[74]
like to the race of leaves—
Accomplishing little, formed out of mud, tribes shadowy and feeble
in form,
Wingless creatures of a day, miserable mortal men resembling dreams!
Turn your mind to us immortals who exist forever:
The ethereal ones, who never grow old and who ponder deathlessly;
So that, after having heard a correct account from us of everything 690
concerning matters aloft,
Knowing correctly the nature of the birds, and the coming into being of
the gods, and of the rivers, and of Erebus[75] and Void,
You can tell Prodicus,[76] from me, to go hoot!
First, there was Void and Night and dark Erebus, and broad Tartarus,[77]
But there was not Earth or Air or Heaven. In the limitless bosoms
of Erebus,
Night the dark-winged bore, at the very first, a wind-egg,
From which, as the seasons revolved, longing Eros,
His back glistening with golden wings, grew—like to windy vortices!
And he, mingling with winged, dark Void upon broad Tartarus
Hatched our race, and first drew it up into the light.
There was no prior race of immortals, before Eros mixed together 700
all things.
But, other things being mixed with others, there came into existence
Heaven, and Ocean,
And Earth, and the undying race of all the blessed gods. So, WE are
By far the oldest of all the blessed ones; and that we are of Eros,
Is evident from many things. For we fly, and we spend time with lovers.
And in the case of many beautiful boys, who have sworn against it
throughout the bloom of their youth,

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74. Scholia suggest an alternative reading: "an ephemeral life."

75. The personified underworld, born from Void [*Chaos*]—which was the primeval emptiness that at first "came into being" according to Hesiod (*Theogony* 116ff).

76. A preeminent sophist, contemporary with Socrates (see *Clouds* 361); he taught that gods were personifications of things beneficial to humans (Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods* 1.118).

77. The personified region far beneath the Underworld; "broad Tartarus" is a Hesiodic formula: *Theogony* 868.

Male lovers have through our force spread their thighs—
One giving the gift of a quail, another a porphyrion, another a goose, another a Persian bird.
And all the greatest things come to mortals through us birds!
In the first place, we signal the seasons—spring, winter, and fall.
It's time to sow, when the whooping crane moves to Libya;[78]
And it announces, to the ship's captain, to hang up his oar and to go to bed,
And to Orestes,[79] to weave a cloak, so that he won't be chilled when he's stripping others!
And after this, the kite in turn appears to signal another season—
The season to fleece the sheep; and then, the swallow:
When it is time to sell your cloak and buy something lighter.
And we are your Ammon, Delphi, Dodona, Phoebus Apollo.[80]
For you go first to a bird, no matter what you turn to,
Whether it be trade, or acquisition of livelihood, or a man's marriage.
And you regard as a bird every matter that is decisively divinatory:[81]
An ominous statement is for you a bird, a sneeze you call a bird,
A coincidence is a bird, a voice is a bird, a servant is a bird, an ass is a bird;
So, is it not manifest that we are for you Apollo's oracle?

If therefore you hold us to be gods,
You will have at your disposal Muses as prophets—
Breezes, seasons, winter, summer,
Heat that is within measure; and we won't run off
To sit solemnly above,
Beyond the clouds, as does Zeus;
Instead, remaining in your presence we will give to you—
To yourselves, to your children, to your children's children,
Wealth in health, life, peace,

78. Announcing the coming winter; Hesiod, *Works and Days* 448–50.
79. Apparently a famous highwayman.
80. The sites of the most famous oracles.
81. The word for "bird" was also used for any omen, because birds were considered especially auspicious.

Youth, laughter, choruses, festivities,
And the milk of birds! The result will be that
So wealthy will you all become!

Chorus: Woodland Muse—
Tio tio tio tio tio tio tiotinx!—
Versatile in song, with whom I,
In the vales and on the peaks of the mountains—
Tio tio tiotinx!—
Perch upon the leafy headed ash—
Tio tio tio tiotinx!—
Singing through my trilling throat,
Bringing forth sacred songs for Pan,
And solemn choral dances for the mountain Mother[82]—
Totototototototototix—
From where, like the honeybee,
Phrynicus[83] consumed the fruit
Of ambrosial tunes, always
Bearing his own sweet song—
Tio tio tio tiotinx!

Chorus Leader: If someone among you, Oh spectators, wishes with the birds
To weave the rest of life in pleasure—let him come to us!
For as many things as are around here repressed, as being shameful by lawful convention,
All these things are, among us birds, noble!
For if around here it is shameful by lawful convention to beat one's father,
This very thing is here noble among us—if someone, running at his father,
Should strike him, saying, "Raise your spur, if you want to fight!"
And, if one of you should happen to be branded on the forehead as a runaway slave,

82. Probably Cybele, a mother-nature goddess whose cult entered Athens from Asia Minor during the Persian wars.

83. An early tragedian whose beautiful songs remained popular especially among the older generation (*Wasps* 220, 268–69, 1490; *Frogs* 910, 1300).

This one shall be called a spotted francolin bird among us!
And if someone should happen to be a Phrygian no less than Spintharos,
Here he may be a Phrygian linnet-bird, of the family of Philemon![84]
And if he is a slave and a Carian like Execestides,[85]
Let him puff up grandfathers among us, and they will appear as
fellow tribesmen!
And if the son of Peisius wishes to betray the gates to dishonored men,
Let him become a partridge, a chick of his father!—
Since among us there is nothing shameful in partridge-flight.
Such things the swans—
Tio tio tio tiotinx!—
With mingled cry, and in unison
Beating wings, shouted to Apollo—
Tio tio tio tiotinx!—
Sitting on the bank by the Hebrus River.[86]—
Tio tio tio tiotinx!—
And through the ethereal cloud went the cry,
And the varied tribes of wild beasts quaked in fear,
And the windless ether quelled the waves—
Totototototototototinx!—
And all Olympus rang!
And astonishment seized the leaders;
And the Olympian Graces,[87]
Together with the Muses, took up the tune—
Tio tio tio tiotinx!

Chorus Leader: Nothing is better or more pleasant than to grow wings!
If one of you spectators were winged,
When he was hungry and irritated at the tragic choruses,
He could take flight and go home for a meal;
And then, being filled, he could fly back to us here again!

84. The joke is unclear.

85. The Carian slave who became an Athenian citizen, mentioned at 11 and 1527.

86. Probably an echo of a famous paean by Alcaeus describing Apollo's flight from the Hyperboreans to Delphi in a swan-drawn chariot.

87. The Graces were daughters of Zeus and attendants of Aphrodite. Hesiod, *Theogeny* 907–11.

And if some Patrocleides[88] among you happened to be shitting,
He wouldn't ooze in his cloak, but would fly up,
And having farted and caught his second wind, fly back again!
And if one of you happens to be an adulterer,
And sees the husband of the woman in the Council seats,[89]
He could spread his wings and fly up away from you,
And then, having fucked, could fly back here again!
So: isn't it worth everything to become winged?
Dietrephes[90] at least, having only flask wings,
Was elected Tribe-commander, and then cavalry commander, and then, from nothing,
He did great things; and is now a twittering cock-horse![91]

[Peisthetairos and Euelpides reemerge, with wings.]

Peisthetairos: So be it. —By Zeus, I have never
Seen a more ridiculous affair!

Euelpides: What are you laughing at?

Peisthetairos: At your wings!
You know what you most resemble in those wings?
A cheap painting of a gander!

Euelpides: And you, a blackbird plucked like a bowl-head![92]

Peisthetairos: In this way we make comparisons illustrating the line of Aeschylus—
"Not by others' but by our own plumes."[93]

Chorus Leader: Come, what are we to do?

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88. A political leader known for his flatulence, according to the scholia.

89. A block of seats in the front was reserved for members of the Council (cf. *Peace* 887, 906).

90. According to the scholia, Dietriphes became rich selling wine flasks, the wicker handles of which were called "wings"; he is mentioned in Thucydides (7.29–30, 8.64) as a commander and an oligarch.

91. The "cock-horse" was a mythic winged creature, used to characterize pompous leaders also at *Peace* 1177.

92. Peisthetairos is evidently bald; in the *Clouds* and *Peace*, Aristophanes makes fun of his own baldness.

93. A famous line from Aeschylus's lost tragedy *Myrmidons* which became proverbial as an expression meaning "the eagle shot by an arrow of eagle feathers," apparently like the English "hoisted by his own petard."

PEISTHETAIROS: First, for the city
Establish some great and glorious name; then,
After this, sacrifice to the gods.

EUELPIDES: These things meet also with my approval.

PEISTHETAIROS: Look here, what will be our name for the city?
Do you wish one that is great, and shall we not call it by
The Lacedaimonian name of Sparta?

EUELPIDES: Heracles!—Me, establish *Sparta* as the name of MY city?!
Not for my bedstead, even if I had the mattress![94]

PEISTHETAIROS: Well, what name shall we establish for it?

EUELPIDES: From the clouds here and the regions aloft,
Something gaping.

PEISTHETAIROS: Do you want "Cloudcuckooia?"

HOOPOE: Hey! Wow!
You have invented a simply beautiful and great name!

EUELPIDES: Then is this Cloudcuckooia itself,
Where there is the great wealth of Theogenes,
And everything belonging to Aeschines?[95]

PEISTHETAIROS: And it is best that
This be the plain of Phlegra,[96] where the gods
Outshot in boastfulness the Earthborn [Giants].

HOOPOE: Shining is this affair of the city! So what god will be
The guardian of the citadel? For whom shall we weave the Peplos?[97]

EUELPIDES: Why not let it be Athena, Guardian of the city?

PEISTHETAIROS: And how would a city ever become well ordered,
Where the god is a woman, who
Stands fully armed, while Cleisthenes[98] holds the spindle?

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94. The word "sparta" meant also the cords used to support the mattress of a bed.

95. Two notorious boasters about their vague or cloudy wealth; see below 1127 and *Wasps* 324, 459, 1243.

96. Where the rebellion of the Giants was crushed by the Olympians led by Zeus.

97. An embroidered robe offered at the great festival to Athena.

98. A notorious effeminate.

Euelpides: So who will hold the Stork Wall[99] of the city?

Hoopoe: A bird from our Persian breed,
Who is everywhere said to be the most fierce
Offspring of Ares.

Euelpides: O master offspring!
How the god is suited to dwell on the rocks!

Peisthetairos: Come now, you go up in the air
And serve to help the builders—
Bring rubble, strip and mix clay,
Carry up the hod, fall off the ladder,
Set up guards, keep the fire always banked,
Make the rounds bearing the alarm bell, and sleep there.
And send a herald up to the gods,
And another herald down to the humans,
And from there back to me.

Euelpides: And you, staying here,
Can go hang!

Peisthetairos: Good fellow, go where I send you!
For nothing of what I say will be accomplished without you!
[Exit Euelpides.]
And I, so that I may sacrifice to the new gods,
Shall summon the priest to conduct the sacrifices.
Boy! Boy! Take the basket and the basin.

Chorus: I row with you,[100] I agree with you,
I join in approving
The approach to the gods with great and solemn songs,
And moreover at the same time the sacrifice of some lamb, to curry favor.
Go! Go! Shout the Pythian cry to the god!
And let Chaeris[101] accompany the song!

99. The "Pelargicon," the ancient wall around the acropolis in Athens.

100. According to the scholia, these lines are modeled on a chorus in Sophocles' lost *Peleus*.

101. A notoriously bad flute player, who used to show up and play uninvited (see *Acharnians* 16, 866; *Peace* 951).

PEISTHETAIROS: You! Cease that puffing! —Heracles! What is this?
By Zeus, I've seen many awful things, but this![102]
I've never yet seen a mouth-band-wearing[103] crow!

[Enter a priest, with a sacrificed goat.]

PEISTHETAIROS: Priest, it's your job: sacrifice to the new gods!

PRIEST: I will do these things. But where is the one who has the basket?
Let us pray; to Hestia[104]—of the birds, and to the Kite who keeps the Hearth,
And to all the Olympian Birds and all the Olympian Birdesses . . .

PEISTHETAIROS: Hail Sounium Hawk, Sea-stork Lord![105]

PRIEST: And to the Pythian and the Delian Swan, and to the Quail-mother Leto, and to Artemis the Goldfinch . . .

PEISTHETAIROS: No longer Colainis,[106] but Goldfinch!

PRIEST: And to Sabazius[107] the Finch, and to the Great Ostrich Mother of gods and of humans . . .

PEISTHETAIROS: Mistress Cybele, the ostrich mother of Cleocritus![108]

PRIEST: Grant health and salvation to these Cloudcuckooians—and also to the Chians . . .

PEISTHETAIROS: It delights me to have the Chians always tacked on![109]

PRIEST: And to the birds who are heroes and children of heroes—to the Porphyrion and the White Pelican and the Grey Pelican and the Red Hawk and the Grouse and the Peacock and the Sedge Warbler and the

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102. The line-numbering here and in what immediately follows varies in the most authoritative editions.

103. A leather muzzle used by flute players to modulate the flow of breathing.

104. The goddess of the hearth, center of household worship and also of the civic worship at the communal hearth.

105. Sounium is the cape south of Athens where stands a famous temple to Poseidon; the hawk is here saluted as replacing Poseidon, and in what follows various birds supplant the traditional divinities.

106. A traditional epithet for Artemis.

107. A Phrygian god, worshipped by the Greeks as Bacchus.

108. A fat fellow notorious for resembling an ostrich: *Frogs* 1437.

109. At official prayers, the Athenians always invoked blessing also for the Chians, who were the only subject-allies who had never revolted against them.

Teal and the Harrier and the Heron and the Gannet and the Black Tit
and the Titmouse and . . .

PEISTHETAIROS: Stop! Go to the crows! Stop calling! Egad!
To what sacred victim, you ill-starred fool, are you calling
Vultures and Sea-eagles!? Don't you see, that
One single kite would snatch and fly away with the meat?!
Get away from us, you with your garlands!
For I by myself alone shall perform this sacrifice!

[Priest exits, leaving the goat.]

CHORUS: Once again, then, for you
Must I raise a second pious and reverent song
For the ablution, and invoke
The Blessed Ones—or rather some one alone,
If you have even enough meat offering for that!
For the offerings here are nothing but
A [goat's] beard and horns!

PEISTHETAIROS: As we sacrifice we shall pray to the winged gods.

POET [entering]: Cloudcuckooia the Happy!
Salute Her, Oh Muse, in singing hymns![110]

PEISTHETAIROS: Where did this come from?! Tell me, WHO are you?

POET: I, giving forth song of "honey-tongued" lyrics,
Am a "nimble servant" of the Muses,
As Homer says.[111]

PEISTHETAIROS: A slave, but you wear your hair that long?![112]

POET: No! Rather, WE are all the EDUCATORS—
And *thus* "nimble servants of the Muses,"
As Homer says.

PEISTHETAIROS: Surely that is why you are wearing such a "nimble," cheap,
little cloak!
Look, poet, why have you come here—for your ruin?

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110. The line-numbering here and in what immediately follows varies in the most authoritative editions.

111. *Iliad* 1.249 has the phrase "honey tongued" and 1.321 "nimble servant."

112. Only free men wore their hair long.

Poet: Because I have made for your Cloudcuckooia
Many beautiful dithyrambs,
And songs for maiden choruses, and also in the manner of Simonides![113]

Peisthetairos: When did you write this poetry? Starting when?

Poet: From of old! From of old do I celebrate this city!

Peisthetairos: Didn't I just make the tenth-day sacrifice,
And just now give the name, as to a baby?

Poet: But the word of the Muses is fleet,
Like the sparkle of horses!
But you, "founding father of Aetna,
Synonymous with the very divine temples,"[114]
Give to me whatever
With a nod of your head you will,
Giving of thine to me!

Peisthetairos: (This fellow is going to give us troubles,
If we don't escape this fellow's clutches by giving him something!)
You there, who have a leather jacket over an under-cloak!
Take it off and give it to this wise poet! . . .
Here, you can have the leather jacket;
You seem altogether chilly to me.

Poet: This with not unwilling affection
The Muse accepts as her gift.
Now you may learn with your mind a little word of Pindar's.

Peisthetairos: (This fellow is not going to depart from us!)

Poet: "For among the Scythian nomads,
Wanders, away from the hosts, he
Who of a woven cloak is not possessed;

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113. A poet famous for his love of money.

114. According to the scholia, this is a quotation from a (lost) poem of Pindar (fragment 105) in honor of the Syracusan tyrant Hiero, who had refounded Catana in Sicily under the name "Aetna."

Inglorious he goes in a leather jacket without underwear!"[115]
Cogitate upon what I am saying.

PEISTHETAIROS: (I cogitate that he wants to take the underwear!)
Okay you, Strip! For one must help the poet!
—Now take this and go!

POET: I depart;
And to the city, after I depart, I shall make the following poetry:
"Celebrate, Oh golden-throned one,[116]
The shivering and icy place!
To the snow-struck plain of numerous paths
I came: La-la-la!"

PEISTHETAIROS: By Zeus! You have surely escaped these
Shivers by taking that underwear! . . .
By Zeus, I never expected this evil—
That so quickly this fellow would learn about the city!
You! Go around once again taking the basin for ablutions!
Let auspicious speech be observed!

ORACLE-COLLECTOR: *Do not start the sacrifice of the goat!*

PEISTHETAIROS: And who are YOU?

ORACLE-COLLECTOR: Who? A collector of oracles!

PEISTHETAIROS: Go hang!

ORACLE-COLLECTOR: Oh you daimonic one! Do not treat vulgarly the divine things!
For there is an oracle of Bacis[117] that speaks plainly
About the Cloudcuckooians!

PEISTHETAIROS: So then how come you did not report this oracle before I Founded this city?

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115. Another comically altered quotation from the proceeding poem of Pindar, with which the poet asked for a chariot, to go with mules that the tyrant had already given as a gift.

116. Pindar speaks of the "golden-throned Muse": *Pythian Odes* 4.464; *Nemian Odes* 1.57.

117. An ancient Boeotian prophet, whose prophecies were compiled in books and enjoyed wide respect during the Peloponnesian War. Cf. *Knights* 123–24, 1003–4; *Peace* 1070.

ORACLE-COLLECTOR: The divine within prevented me.

PEISTHETAIROS: Well, there's nothing like hearing the verses!

ORACLE-COLLECTOR: "But when wolves and hoary crows will dwell in the same spot betwixt Corinth and Sicyon . . ."

PEISTHETAIROS: What in the world concerning Corinth pertains to ME?!

ORACLE-COLLECTOR: Bacis utters this as a riddle in regard to the air!
"First, to Pandora[118] sacrifice a white-haired lamb;
And he who shall come as the first prophetic expounder of my words,
To him give a clean cloak and new sandals . . ."

PEISTHETAIROS: *Sandals* are in there?

ORACLE-COLLECTOR: Here, take the book!
"And give also a cup, and fill his hands with the entrails! . . ."

PEISTHETAIROS: And giving the *entrails* is in there?

ORACLE-COLLECTOR: Here, take the book!
"And, if, Oh divinely inspired youth, thou shalt do as I command,
Thou shalt become an eagle in the clouds! But, if thou givest not,
Thou shalt become neither dove nor eagle nor oak-woodpecker! . . ."

PEISTHETAIROS: These things too are in there?

ORACLE-COLLECTOR: Here, take the book!

PEISTHETAIROS: Well, the oracle is not at all the same as this one,
Which I took down as dictation from Apollo!—
"Now if ever an uninvited boasting human should arrive,
Troubling the sacrifices and desiring the entrails,
Then indeed one must beat him in the middle of his ribs . . ."
[Striking the oracle-collector]

ORACLE-COLLECTOR: I think you are talking nonsense!

PEISTHETAIROS: Here, take the book!
"And spare nothing, not even if he be an eagle in the clouds,
Or Lampon, or even the great Diopeithes!"[119]

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118. An earth-goddess, whose name means "Giver of all gifts."

119. Well-known soothsayers: for Lampon, see 521 and *Clouds* 332; for Diopeithes (a prosecutor of atheists), *Knights* 1085 and *Wasps* 580.

ORACLE-COLLECTOR: These things are in there?!

PEISTHETAIROS: Here, take the book!
Won't you exit? —to the crows!

ORACLE-COLLECTOR: Woe is me! I *am* a coward!

PEISTHETAIROS: Will you not run off, to deliver oracles elsewhere!?

METON[120]: I come among you . . .

PEISTHETAIROS: YET ANOTHER foul fellow here!
So what are YOU doing? What's your form of project?
What's the conceit, what's afoot?

METON: I wish to measure the air geometrically
For you, and measure it out in proportion to the earth.

PEISTHETAIROS: In the name of the gods!
Who ARE you among men?

METON: Who am I?
I'm *Meton*! Whom Hellas and Colonus know![121]

PEISTHETAIROS: Tell me,
What are these things of yours?

METON: Air-measurers.
For air is in its form as a whole
Very much like an oven.[122] So I apply
The measuring ruler, and from above I insert this bent
Compass[123]—you do understand?

PEISTHETAIROS: I do NOT understand!

METON: I shall measure by applying the straight measuring stick, so that
The circle will become for you squared, and in the middle

120. A famous scientist, astronomer, and mathematician; his proposed reform of the calendar may be referred to by the chorus of Clouds in *Clouds* 615.

121. Meton had recently erected a water clock in a part of Athens named Colonus.

122. The same analogy is ascribed to Socrates and his followers by Strepsiades in *Clouds* 96, except that Strepsiades supposes that the doctrine is that the air is literally a stove.

123. The "bent compass" appears in *Clouds* 178 as the instrument which Socrates is reported by his student to have been pretending to use to lay out a geometric problem while actually using it to snare and filch a cloak to pay for supper.

Will be the agora, with roads leading straight into
The middle of it—even as from a star,
Itself being circular, in every direction
Shine forth straight rays.

PEISTHETAIROS: This human is a Thales![124] —Meton!

METON: What is it?

PEISTHETAIROS: You know how much I love you;
So, be persuaded by me, and slip away down the road.

METON: What's so terrible a danger?

PEISTHETAIROS: As in Sparta,
Certain people are driven out as strangers;[125]
There are many beatings throughout the city.

METON: So you have civil strife?

PEISTHETAIROS: By Zeus, no indeed!

METON: Well then what?

PEISTHETAIROS: It is agreed by all, united in spirit, to crush all boasters.

METON: Then I should be on my way!

PEISTHETAIROS: By Zeus, I don't know whether
You'll be quick enough! For they have come very near!

METON: Alas! I am ill starred!

PEISTHETAIROS: Did I not long ago warn you?
Won't you go away and measure yourself?!

INSPECTOR: Where are the consuls?

PEISTHETAIROS: Who's THIS Sardanapalus?[126]

INSPECTOR: I come hither as Inspector, having been chosen by the lot,
To the Cloudcuckooians.

PEISTHETAIROS: Inspector?!
Who sent you here?

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124. Thales is renowned as the first recorded philosopher. In *Clouds* 180 Strepsiades, having heard of Socrates' feat with the bent compass, asks, "So why do we wonder at Thales?"

125. Sparta kept aliens out to prevent corruption of the citizenry.

126. The proverbially luxurious last king of Assyria.

INSPECTOR: A paltry bill of Teleas.[127]

PEISTHETAIROS: What?! Look, do you want to get paid,
And go away without having trouble?

INSPECTOR: Yes, by the gods! I need to be busy in the Assembly at home, anyway.
For I have to do business for Pharnaces.[128]

PEISTHETAIROS: Take it and leave: here's the payoff [striking him]!

INSPECTOR: What's this?!

PEISTHETAIROS: It's an Assembly about that Pharnaces!

INSPECTOR: I call to witness that I, an Inspector, am being beaten!

PEISTHETAIROS: Will you not get out? Will you not take away your twin voting urns?[129]
[Inspector exits.]
—Isn't this terrible? They're sending inspectors
To the city, before the gods have had their sacrifices!

SELLER OF DECREES: "*and if the Cloudcuckooians do injustice to an Athenian . . .*"

PEISTHETAIROS: Now what evil is THIS—this scroll?!

SELLER OF DECREES: A seller of decrees am I, and new laws
I come hither to sell to you!

PEISTHETAIROS: With regard to WHAT?!

SELLER OF DECREES: "*Cloudcuckooia is to employ the same measurements and*
Weights and decrees as the Olophyxians."[130]

PEISTHETAIROS: And you will soon have to use the same as the Ototyxians!

SELLER OF DECREES: Look fellow, what is your problem?

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127. See note 25.

128. A Persian satrap or proconsul (the implication is of treasonous dealings with the Persians, inveterate enemies of the Greeks).

129. The Athenian inspector has brought the equipment for democratic politics.

130. The city Olophyxus has a name that sounds like the Greek word for "lament," *ototozein*, upon which the pun is made in the following line.

Peisthetairos: Will you not take away your laws?!
Bitter are the laws I shall show you today!

[Inspector re-enters.]

Inspector: I summon Peisthetairos
On a charge of hubris,
To appear in the month of Munychion![131]

Peisthetairos: Are you for real? Are you *still* here!?

Seller of Decrees: "*If someone should drive out the officials and not receive them*
In accordance with the treaty . . ."

Peisthetairos: Egad, am I ill starred! Are YOU still here too?

Inspector: I'll destroy you and I'll indict you for a penalty of ten thousand drachmas!

Peisthetairos: And I'll smash your twin voting urns!

[Inspector exits, on the run.]

Seller of Decrees: Do you remember those evenings when you used to crap on the monument?!

Peisthetairos: Egad! Someone seize him! [Seller of Decrees flees.] So, you aren't staying?
Let's get away from here as quickly as possible,
And go inside in order to sacrifice the goat to the gods.

[Exit Peisthetairos and slaves with goat.]

Chorus: Now it is to Me, the All-seeing
And All-ruling, that all mortals
Will sacrifice with votive prayers.
For I watch over the entire earth,
And I preserve the blooming crops
By killing the breed of many tribes
Of wild beasts, who with omnivorous jaws
Devour everything on earth that grows from the pod
And the fruit on the branches on which they sit;

131. Roughly, April, when lawsuits involving non-Athenians were heard.

And I kill those who the fragrant fruits
Destroy with most hateful pollutions—
Snakes and biting insects, all
Perish in deaths beneath my wing!

Chorus Leader: On this very day it was announced,
That if any one of you slays Diagoras the Melian,[132]
He will receive as reward a talent; and if someone slays one of
The dead tyrants,[133] he will receive a talent![134]
Now, it is our wish that here also we proclaim the very same things.
If any one of you slays Philocrates the Sparrovian,[135]
Let him take a talent, and if he captures him living, four!
For he strings up finches and sells them for seven obols;
And then, having inflated the thrushes, he displays them and does outrage upon them;
He sticks feathers up the noses of the blackbirds;
He similarly holds captive pigeons that he has taken,
Whom he compels to serve as decoys bound in a net!
These things we wish to announce; and if someone among you
Is raising birds that he keeps in the courtyard, we charge him to let them go!
And if you do not obey, you will be captured by the birds
And in turn *you* will be bound as decoys by *us*!

Chorus: Happy race of winged
Birds, who in winter
Do not clothe themselves in wool!
Nor again in the stifling heat does
The far-flashing ray heat us:
But I dwell in the bosoms of
Flowery, leafy meadows
When the divine sharp song of the grasshopper,

132. See 186.

133. The last tyrant of Athens was expelled in 510 B.C., but the fear of tyrants was constantly whipped up by demagogues.

134. A substantial measure of money.

135. See 14.

Crazed by the sun, shouts out in the noonday heat!
And I winter in hollow caves
Playing with mountain Nymphs!
And in spring we feed on virgin
White young myrtle and the garden herbs of the Graces![136]

To the judges we wish to say something about the victory:
How many good things we will give to all of them, if they judge for us,
So that they will get greater gifts by far than from those of Alexander.[137]
For in the first place, what every judge especially aims for—
You will never lack Laureian owls;[138]
But they'll dwell with you, and in your purses
Build nests, where they will hatch little coins!
And then in addition, you will dwell as if in temples:
For we will roof your homes with gables that look like eagles!
And if you obtain a little office and wish to engage in a bit of corruption,
We'll put a sharp little hawk in your hands!
And if you are dining somewhere, we'll send you some bird gizzards!
BUT: if you do NOT judge us first, then build bronze moon-shaped shields to carry
As if you were statues![139] For whoever of you doesn't have a "moon,"
Then, when you are wearing a white dress cloak especially, you will
Pay the just punishment through us, being crapped on by all the birds!

Peisthetairos: The divine omens are all fine for us, Oh birds!
But no messenger has come from the wall,
From whom we might learn about affairs there.
But here comes running one with Alphian panting![140]

First messenger: Where, where is he? Where, where, where is he?
Where, where, where is he? Oh where,
Where, is Peisthetairos the ruler?

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136. The line-numbering here and in what immediately follows varies in the most authoritative editions.

137. A name of Paris, who was offered gifts by the goddesses among whom he was asked to judge a beauty contest.

138. The coins of Athens, from silver mined at Laureium and stamped with the figure of an owl, the bird sacred to Athena.

139. The scholia says that little cups were put over statues to protect them from bird droppings.

140. I.e., like someone running in the Olympics. (The Alpheus river flows to Olympia.)

PEISTHETAIROS: Here!

FIRST MESSENGER: Your wall has been built!

PEISTHETAIROS: You speak well!

FIRST MESSENGER: A most beautiful and most magnificent work!
Such in width that Proxenides of the loud-mouth district
And Theogenes[141] could with two chariots
Drawn by horses as big as the Trojan,
Pass one another!

PEISTHETAIROS: Heracles!

FIRST MESSENGER: And the height, since I measured it myself, 1130
Is one hundred spans![142]

PEISTHETAIROS: Oh Poseidon, how great!
Who built it so big?

FIRST MESSENGER: Birds, no one else: not an Egyptian
Bricklayer, not a stonemason, not a carpenter was present;
But with their own hands, so that it amazed me.
For from Libya there came about thirty thousand
Cranes, having swallowed foundation stones.[143]
These the crakes fashioned with their beaks.
Ten thousand other storks carried the bricks up;
And water the lapwings and other water birds 1140
Carried from below up into the air.

PEISTHETAIROS: Who carried the mortar up to them?

FIRST MESSENGER: Herons, in hods.

PEISTHETAIROS: How did they pour the mortar in?

FIRST MESSENGER: This, my good fellow, was devised in the wisest fashion!
The geese, digging down as if with shovels,
Got it into the hods for them with their feet!

PEISTHETAIROS: What, indeed, would feet not accomplish!?[144]

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141. See 822.
142. A span was the length of the outstretched arms, or about six feet.
143. Cranes were believed to swallow stones for ballast when flying; see also 1429.
144. The proverb was, "What indeed would hands not accomplish?"

First messenger: And, by Zeus, the ducks carried
The bricks in girdles around the waist!
And the swallows flew up carrying the trowel
Behind, even as a child carries the mud against his stomach!

Peisthetairos: Why indeed would anyone pay hired workers still?
Come, look: what about this: who fashioned the wooden beams for
The wall?

First messenger: Birds were the carpenters:
Most wise woodpeckers, who with their beaks
Pecked the gates. And there was a noise
While they were hewing as in a shipyard.
Now everything is gated with gates,
And fastened and guarded in a circle,
The rounds are being made, the alarm bell carried, everywhere
Guards are established and watch-fires
In towers. But I'm running off
To wash up. You yourself do the other things now.

Chorus Leader: Look here, what are you doing? Are you astounded that
The wall has thus been built so swiftly?

Peisthetairos: I am, by the gods! And I deserve to be!
For it truly appears to me to be equivalent to lies!
But here is a guard as messenger from the ones there
Running toward us looking like a war-dancer!

Second messenger: Yi! Yi! Yi! Yi! Yi! Yi!

Peisthetairos What's the matter?

Second messenger: We have suffered the most terrible things!
For one of the gods from Zeus has just
Flown through the gates into the air,
Escaping the notice of the jackdaw day-sentinels!

Peisthetairos: Oh what a terrible deed, and what a scoundrel to have done it!
Which of the gods was it?

Second messenger: We don't know; but that it had wings,
This we know.

PEISTHETAIROS: Should you not have sent the city guards after him
In hot pursuit?

SECOND MESSENGER: But we did send
Thirty thousand falcons as mounted archers,
And every one went with talons curved,
Hawk, buzzard, vulture, owl, eagle!
With the rush and the wings and the whirring
The ether vibrates as the god is sought!
And the god's not far away, but already somewhere around here,
Presumably.

PEISTHETAIROS: Then we should take up slings
And bows! Every servant run hither!
Take up the bow! Strike! Someone give me a sling!

CHORUS: War is raised! An unspeakable war
Between me and the gods!
But guard the entire
Cloud-wrapped air,
That Erebus bore,
Lest some god
Escape your notice going by here!
Everyone gather in a circle looking out,
Because nearby is audible the sound
Of the winged whir of some divinity aloft!

PEISTHETAIROS: Here, you! Where, where, where are you flying to?
Stay calm,
Hold, unflinching! Stand here! Hold back from running!
. . . Who are you? From where? You must say where in the world
you're from!

IRIS[145]: *I* am from the Olympian Gods!

PEISTHETAIROS: Your name: what is it? Sail or head?[146]

145. The messenger-goddess Rainbow, daughter of Wonder and Electra. Winged, she dressed in thin silk that in sunlight had all the colors seen in the rainbow.

146. The question is apparently prompted by her appearance onstage—her dress and wings look like sails, and her headdress is equally striking.

IRIS: Iris the swift!

PEISTHETAIROS: The Paralus or the Salaminia?[147]

IRIS: What's that?!

PEISTHETAIROS: Why doesn't some three-balled buzzard fly up and grab her?

IRIS: Seize ME?!—
What in the world is this evil?

PEISTHETAIROS: You'll suffer in a big way!

IRIS: This is a very strange business!

PEISTHETAIROS: Through which gates
Did you get in through the wall, you most vile ~~one~~?

IRIS: By Zeus, *I* do not know which gates!

PEISTHETAIROS: You hear how ironic she's being?
Did you go after the jackdaw sentinels?—Aren't you going to say?
Do you have a pass from the storks?

IRIS: What is this evil?!

PEISTHETAIROS: So you didn't get one!?

IRIS: Are you sane?

PEISTHETAIROS: Nor did any bird official stick on you a pass-badge?

IRIS: By Zeus, fellow, no one stuck anything on ME!

PEISTHETAIROS: Aha! So then you flew silently
Through a foreign city and the void?

IRIS: For in what other way *should* the GODS fly?!

PEISTHETAIROS: By Zeus, I don't know; but not in THIS way!
You are now committing injustice. SO: do you know this, that
It would be most just for you, of all Irises, being caught,
To die—if you got what you deserve?

IRIS: But I'm deathless!

PEISTHETAIROS: But all the same, you are to die.

147. The two swiftest Athenian ships, sent out on special missions.

For we'll be undergoing terrible things, in my opinion,
If we rule over the others, but if you gods
Are unrestrained, and still do not know that
You must pay heed in your turn to the stronger!
But tell me, where are you navigating to with those wings?

IRIS: I? I fly to human beings from the Father,
Announcing that they are to sacrifice to the Olympian gods
With sheep-slaughter on sacrificial hearths
Filling the street with savor.

PEISTHETAIROS: What are you saying? —To WHICH gods?

IRIS: WHICH? . . . US! The gods in heaven!

PEISTHETAIROS: YOU are gods?!

IRIS: For who ELSE is a god?

PEISTHETAIROS: The birds are now gods for humans,
And sacrifice is to be made to them; but, by Zeus! NOT to Zeus!

IRIS: You fool! You fool!—do not stir up the awful thoughts of gods,
Lest Justice wreak destruction upon your entire race
With the spade of Zeus,
And by fire, your body, and the enfolding walls of your house,
Incinerate with Licymnian bolts![148]

PEISTHETAIROS: Listen, you! Cease these bombastic sputterings!
(And you there: stand fast without trembling!)—Now, look here:
Do you think I'm a Lydian, or a Phrygian,[149] whom you are going to spook by talking this way?
Don't you know that if Zeus gives me too much grief,
His roof and halls of Amphion[150]
I shall incinerate, using fire-bearing eagles?!
And I shall send into heaven against him porphyrion birds
Clad in leopard skins,

148. The *Licymnius* is a lost tragedy of Euripides; the phraseology here is taken from tragedy.

149. Civilized non-Greek or "barbarian" peoples in the Persian empire; the phrase is from Euripides' *Alcestis* 675.

150. Spoofing a line from the lost *Niobe* of Aeschylus.

More than six hundred in number! —And indeed there was an occasion
When a single Porphyrion gave him trouble![151]
And you: if you give me grief in some way, I'll spread
The thighs of His chief serving girl, and screw
This Iris here, so that you'll be astonished
How, though I am an old man, I can show an erection as big as three ships' prows!

Iris: May you be split, fellow, for these utterances!

Peisthetairos: Will you not scat?! Quickly! . . . Shoo! Shoo!

Iris: MY FATHER will put a stop to your hybris!

Peisthetairos: Alas! Alas! —Won't you please fly somewhere else
And "incinerate"[152] one of the younger fellows?

[Exit Iris.]

Chorus: We have shut out the Zeus-born gods
From ever again passing through my city,
Nor ever again shall there be sent through here, from mortals on the plain,
Some smoke dedicated to the gods!

Peisthetairos: It is frightening, if the herald who
Went to the mortals
Will never again return home.

Herald: Oh Peisthetairos! Oh blessed one! Oh wisest one!
Oh most glorious one! Oh wisest one! Oh most subtle one!
Oh thrice blessed! Oh (—give the cue!)[153]

Peisthetairos: What are you saying?

Herald: With this golden crown, on account of your wisdom,
All the peoples crown and honor you!

Peisthetairos: I accept. But why do the peoples honor thus me?

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151. Porphyrion was a leader of the Giants who warred with the Olympians led by Zeus. See 553.

152. With an obscene double entendre.

153. The actor playing the Herald here comically breaks the dramatic illusion.

HERALD: Oh you who founded the most glorious ethereal city,
Don't you know how much honor you have from humans,
How many passionate lovers you have of this land!
For before you founded this city,
All humans had become, at that time, crazed with Spartan ways:
They wore long hair, they starved themselves, they lived in filth,
they Socratized,
They carried Spartan message-scrolls around; but now, revolutionizing,
They learn to be birds, and do everything for the sake of pleasure—
In which they imitate the birds!
In the first place, together they all from bed straightway
Fly at dawn, as we do, up to the law/pasture;[154]
And then together they brood upon archival books;
And then graze upon decrees.
They have become so manifestly bird-crazed that
Many have been given birds' names.
"Partridge" one lame merchant is named,
And Menippus[155] is called "Swallow,"
Opuntius[156] "One-eyed Raven,"
Philocles[157] "Crested Lark," Theogenes[158] "Sheldrake,"
Lycurgus "Ibis," Chaerephon[159] "Vampire-bat,"
Syracosius[160] "Jay." And Meidias is there
Called "Quail"—for he is like a quail
Flipped on its head by a quail-flipper.[161]

154. A play on the word *nomos*, which means both "pasture" and "law."

155. A horse-breeder and blacksmith: the word for the hollow of a horse's foot sounded like the word for "swallow."

156. An obnoxious, one-eyed informer: see 153.

157. See 281.

158. See 822.

159. The student and associate of Socrates in the *Clouds*; see also *Wasps* 1408. He is likened to a bat apparently because of his gaunt, death-like appearance.

160. An orator ridiculed for his croaking speech who, according to the scholia, got a decree passed restraining the liberty of speech of comic poets and in particular outlawing reference in plays to citizens by their real names.

161. Referring to a curious sport of the time, in which a human contestant tried to make a quail back off using his finger.

And on account of love of birds all are singing a song,
In which some swallow is in the lyrics,
Or a wild duck, or some goose, or a ring-dove,
Or wings, or even some small part of a feather!
So much about things down there. But one thing I tell you:
There are coming here, from there, more than ten thousand
In need of wings and taloned characteristics.
So you have to get wings from somewhere for the arrivals!

PEISTHETAIROS: Then, by Zeus, our work can't be delayed!
But, as quickly as possible, you run in and
Fill the crates and baskets with wings;
Let Manes bring the wings to me at the gate;
And I shall receive those who are coming for them.

[Manes the slave rushes off, soon returning with baskets; during the following lines he is reviled and beaten intermittently.]

CHORUS: Soon "many-manned" is what
This city will be called by a human!

PEISTHETAIROS: If only fortune is favorable!

CHORUS: Passionate lovers of my city are pouring in!

PEISTHETAIROS [to slaves]: I command you, move faster!

CHORUS: For what, that is noble for a real man,
Does not dwell in this city?—
Wisdom, Longing, the immortal Graces,
And the cheerful countenance of kindly
Tranquility![162]

PEISTHETAIROS [to slaves]: How slackly you serve!
Can't you comply more quickly?

CHORUS: Someone quickly bring the basket of wings!
You, goad them on!

PEISTHETAIROS: By beating this fellow, THUS!

CHORUS: Yes, for he's as slow as some donkey!

---

162. Wisdom, Longing, and Tranquility are personified deities.

PEISTHETAIROS: For Manes is an unmanly one.

CHORUS: And you, first
Set out the wings in order, thus:
The musical ones together, and the prophetic, and
The seafaring. And next look to see that, in a prudent fashion,
You apply the wings to each man.

PEISTHETAIROS: By the kestrels! I'll not hold back anymore from you,
When I see you being so unmanly and slow!
[Beats Manes.]

A FATHER-BEATER: Would that I might become a high-flying eagle,
So that I might fly up over the swell
Of the barren, shining sea![163]

PEISTHETAIROS: It's likely that the messenger was not false in his message;
For here comes someone singing of eagles.

FATHER-BEATER: Hey!
There is nothing sweeter than to be winged!
I am bird-crazy, and I fly and I wish
To dwell with you; and I desire *your* lawful conventions!

PEISTHETAIROS: Which lawful conventions?! For there are many lawful conventions of the birds.

FATHER-BEATER: All of 'em! But especially that it is conventionally held to be noble
Among birds to choke and bite one's father!

PEISTHETAIROS: Yes, by Zeus, he is lawfully held by us to be very manly,
Whoever as a chick has beaten his father!

FATHER-BEATER: These are the reasons why I have emigrated hither,
Desiring to strangle my father, and to have everything!

PEISTHETAIROS: But there is an ancient lawful convention among us birds,
Inscribed on the tablets of the storks:
"When the father stork has

163. The language mixes Homeric and other famous poetic echoes, and is partly borrowed, according to the scholia, from the lost *Oenomaus* of Sophocles.

Nourished all the little storklings to the point where they are
Fledged, the offspring must in turn nourish the father."

FATHER-BEATER: Then much have I gained to enjoy, by Zeus, by coming hither,
If my father's going to feed off me!!!

PEISTHETAIROS: No matter: for since, fellow, you have come
Well disposed, I shall make you winged as if you were an orphan bird.[164]
And you, young man, I shall not ill advise,
But I'll give you the very advice I learned when I was a boy; for you
Must not beat your father; taking this → ≠ like this idea
Wing and this spur, each in one of your hands, [illegible]
Believe, in accordance with convention, that you have here this crest of a rooster:
Stand guard, campaign as a soldier, support yourself as a mercenary,
Let your father live; but when you are in the mood for a fight,
Fly away to affairs in Thrace, and fight there!

FATHER-BEATER: By Dionysus, in my opinion you speak well,[165]
And I shall be persuaded by you!

PEISTHETAIROS: And then, by Zeus, you'll have intelligence!

KINESIAS[166] [singing]: I fly up toward Olympus on light wings![167]
And I fly a path of different melodies at different times—

PEISTHETAIROS: This business is in need of a weight of wings!

KINESIAS: —With fearless mind and body ascending the new path—

PEISTHETAIROS: We greet scrawny Kinesias!
Why have you circled in your circling dances with your lame foot hither?

KINESIAS [sings]: I wish to become a bird, a clear-voiced nightingale.

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164. In Athens, orphaned sons of citizens who died in battle were maintained in honor by the city.

165. The line-numbering here and in what immediately follows varies in the most authoritative editions.

166. A dithyrambic poet, unusually thin, involved in writing for certain characteristic sacred circle-dances of choruses in festivals.

167. Spoofing a line from the lyric poet Anacreon, according to the scholia.

PEISTHETAIROS: Stop singing, and *tell* me what you are saying!

KINESIAS: After having been made winged by you, I wish to fly aloft
And pluck from the Clouds new
Air-soaring and snow-beaten preludes!

PEISTHETAIROS: From the Clouds you would pluck preludes?

KINESIAS: Yes, for our art is derived from thence.[168]
For the bright things in dithyrambs
Are airy and misty and darkly gleaming
And soaring on wings; but as you listen, you will soon know:

PEISTHETAIROS: No! Not I!

KINESIAS: Yes, by Heracles, you!
For you, I shall go through EVERYTHING about air:
[Singing] Images of winged,
Ether-treading,
Slender-necked birds!—

PEISTHETAIROS: Whoa!

KINESIAS: —Bounding along the saltwater path,
I would go on the streams of the winds!—

PEISTHETAIROS: By Zeus, *I* shall stop your wind! [Lunges for him.]

KINESIAS [eluding Peisthetairos]:—At times striking off on a southern path,
At times, again, northward my body bending,
Cutting a harborless furrow of ether!—
[Here apparently Peisthetairos gooses him.]
[No longer singing] Very gracefully, old fellow, you act the sophist
With these wise tricks!

PEISTHETAIROS: So you aren't grateful to become "soaring on wings?"

KINESIAS: You have done thus to the Teacher-producer of the circle dances?!
To ME, over whom the tribes always fight?![169]

168. This and what follows echo *Clouds* 331–38.

169. The ten tribes of the Athenian citizenry competed in dithyrambic contests, and for the best producers.

Peisthetairos: Do you wish, then, to stay with us and teach
For Leotriphides[170] a chorus of winged birds
Of the Crake-tribe?

Kinesias: You are ridiculing me, it's obvious!
But then I for my part shall *not* stop, know well,
Until winged I run through the air!

[Exit Kinesias.]

Impoverished "Sycophant" [singing]: Who are these birds of varied wing,
Possessing nothing?—
You long-winged one, of varied-hue, you swallow![171]

Peisthetairos: This is no paltry evil that has broken out!
This fellow has come hither, warbling in his turn!

Sycophant: Again I address you, long-winged one, of varied-hue!

Peisthetairos: (It seems to me that the song he sings refers to his cloak,
But it's likely he'll need more than a few swallows!)[172]

Sycophant: Who's the one here who puts wings on those who arrive?

Peisthetairos: Here he is; but you need to say what it is you want.

Sycophant: Wings, wings are wanted![173] Don't inquire twice!

Peisthetairos: So do you intend to fly straight to Pellene?[174]

Sycophant: No, by Zeus! I am an island summons-server,
And sycophant, . . .

Peisthetairos: Bless you for your art!

Sycophant: And pettifogger. So I need to take wings
In order to go around bothering cities with summonses.

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170. Another very thin fellow, like the poet Kinesias.

171. Spoofingly adapted from the poet Alcaeus.

172. Meaning, his cloak is so threadbare that it evokes swallows to signal the return of Spring, referring to the ancient Greek proverb, "one swallow does not Spring make."

173. According to the scholia, a spoofing play on a famous line in the lost *Myrmidons* of Aeschylus: "weapons, weapons, are wanted!"

174. Where victors in chariot races received thick honorary cloaks.

PEISTHETAIROS: With wings you'll be wiser in some way at
summons-serving?

SYCOPHANT: No, by Zeus, but the pirates won't give me grief,
And I'll come back with the cranes,
Having swallowed many lawsuits for ballast.

PEISTHETAIROS: So is this really the work you perform? Tell me, 1430
Do you, a young man, play the sycophant with foreigners?

SYCOPHANT: For what am I to do? I don't know how to shovel!

PEISTHETAIROS: But there are other moderate jobs, by Zeus!
—From which a man of your size ought to make his livelihood,
In a way so much more just than contriving lawsuits!

SYCOPHANT: Give me wings, not advice, you divinely possessed fellow!

PEISTHETAIROS: I am now giving you wings, through speech.

SYCOPHANT: And how through speeches
Would you make a man winged?

PEISTHETAIROS: All are through speeches
Made aflutter.[175]

SYCOPHANT: All?

PEISTHETAIROS: Have you not heard,
When fathers on occasion say 1440
About their lads, in the barbershops, the following things:
"It's terrible how Dieitrephes[176] with his talk has
My lad flying about chariot-driving."
And another will say of his, that it's tragedy
About which he's flying—and that his thinking has "flown away."

SYCOPHANT: So then they are winged through speeches?

PEISTHETAIROS: So I assert.
For by speeches the mind is raised aloft
And the human being is elevated. And thus I

175. An idiom, meaning "stirred up."
176. See 798.

Wish to set you flying, with worthy speeches,
That exhort to lawful work.

SYCOPHANT: But I don't wish it!

PEISTHETAIROS: But what will you do?

SYCOPHANT: I'll not disgrace my lineage!
To be a sycophant is for me an ancestral calling of my grandfather.
But give me swift and light wings—
Of a falcon, or a kestrel, so that, on foreigners
Having served summonses,
I can then get a judgment here,
And then fly back there again!

PEISTHETAIROS: I understand.
What you are saying is this—so that the foreigner may lose the
Lawsuit here, before he has even arrived!

SYCOPHANT: You have understood entirely.

PEISTHETAIROS: And then while he is sailing here, you can fly there again,
To rob him of his property!

SYCOPHANT: You've got it entirely—
No different from a spinning top!

PEISTHETAIROS: I understand—
Tops, uh-huh. . . . And by Zeus, I have
Such very beautiful *Corcyraean*[177] wings for this!

SYCOPHANT: Egad! Alas! You've got a whip!

PEISTHETAIROS: This is a pair of wings,
With which I shall make you spin like a top this day!

SYCOPHANT: Alas! Alas!

PEISTHETAIROS: Will you not fly from here?
Will you not drop off into destruction, you most evil one?
You shall swiftly see bitter evil-working-twisting-of-justice!
[To slaves] Let's gather up the wings and depart!

177. Corcyra was famous for making double-thonged whips, and for troops armed with whips (Thucydides 4.47).

Chorus: Many and strange and
Wonderful are the things over which we have flown, and
Terrible are the affairs we have seen!
For there is a tree, by nature
Cleonymus[178]—
Worthless, and otherwise
Cowardly and large.
It always in the springtime
Grows and plays the sycophant,
And in winter once again
Throws off shields like leaves.

There is, again, a certain far-off land
Near darkness itself,
Bereft of lights,
Where humans with heroes
Dine, and
Mingle until evening;
Then no longer
Is the encounter safe.
For if one of the mortals encounters the hero
Orestes[179] at night,
He would be stripped and paralyzed by him
On the right side.

Prometheus: Alas! Alas! Oh that Zeus may not see me!
Where is Peisthetairos?

Peisthetairos: Here, what's this?
Who's the fellow wrapped up?

Prometheus: Do you see any of the gods
Behind me there?

Peisthetairos: By Zeus, I do not!
But who are YOU?

Prometheus: How late is it in the day?

178. See note 36.
179. The hero of Aeschylus's trilogy, the *Oresteia*, but also the famous robber referred to at 712.

PEISTHETAIROS: How late? A little after noon.
But WHO ARE you?

PROMETHEUS: Is it Ox-loosing time, or later in the day?

PEISTHETAIROS: Egad! You're reducing me to idiocy!

PROMETHEUS: What's Zeus doing?
Dispersing the clouds, or gathering them?

PEISTHETAIROS: Go hang high!

PROMETHEUS: Here; I'll uncover myself!

PEISTHETAIROS: PROMETHEUS, my friend!!

PROMETHEUS: SHHH! Stop! Don't shout!

PEISTHETAIROS: What is it?

PROMETHEUS: Silence! Do not call my name!
For you will be my destruction, if Zeus sees me here!
But, so that I might inform you of all the affairs above,
Take this parasol of mine and hold it up
Over, so that the gods won't see me.

PEISTHETAIROS: Hey! Wow!
That is good thinking, and very "Promethean"![180]
Get under it quick, and then be bold to tell me.

PROMETHEUS: Now listen—

PEISTHETAIROS: Talk, I'm listening!

PROMETHEUS: Zeus is destroyed!

PEISTHETAIROS: Since when is he destroyed?

PROMETHEUS: Since when you settled in the air.
For no one of the humans still sacrifices anything
To the gods, and no savor of thigh meat
Come up to us since that time,
But we fast as at the Thesmophoria,[181]
Without burnt offerings. And the barbarian gods,
Who are starving and screeching like Illyrians,

180. The word means "thinking ahead."

181. An Athenian women's festival in honor of Demeter, which included one day of fasting.

Declare that they will start a military campaign from above
against Zeus,[182]
If he doesn't get the markets reopened,
So that chopped innards can be introduced again!

PEISTHETAIROS: So there are some other, barbarian gods
Above you?!

PROMETHEUS: Aren't there barbarian ones,
Among whom is the ancestral deity of Execestides?[183]

PEISTHETAIROS: And the name of these barbarian gods—
What is it?

PROMETHEUS: What is it?—"Triballians."[184]

PEISTHETAIROS: I understand: isn't that where "rub yourself off!" has come from? 1530

PROMETHEUS: Most of all! But one thing I tell you plainly:
Envoys will be coming here to negotiate—
From Zeus and from the Triballians up beyond.
You should not make peace, unless Zeus hands
The scepter over again to these birds,
And gives Basileia to you to have as wife.[185]

PEISTHETAIROS: Who is Basileia?

PROMETHEUS: The most beautiful girl,
Who keeps the thunderbolt of Zeus
And everything else together—good counsel,
Good lawful rule, moderation, dock arsenals, 1540
Invective, the judicial paymaster, the three-obol payments.[186]

PEISTHETAIROS: So she keeps everything for him?

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182. The barbarian gods are being compared to the barbarians from the interior, who could attack the Greek cities on the coast of Illyria.

183. The citizen whose dubious ancestry makes him a special butt of this play; see 11 and 764.

184. The name of a fierce Thracian tribe allied with Athens; the name also connotes male sexual arousal and energetic or excessive sexual activity, to which savage barbarians were conceived as highly prone; Greek words with the root for "rub" (*tribō*) are charged with connotations of chafing the genitals to arousal.

185. "Basileia" means both "Queen" and "royal power."

186. The daily pay for a juror's service.

Prometheus: So I declare.
And if you take her from him, you'll have everything!
That's why I came hither, to explain to you.
For I am always well disposed in mind to humans!

Peisthetairos: For it is on account of you alone among gods that we cook over coals!

Prometheus: And I hate all the gods, as you know!

Peisthetairos: By Zeus, you were indeed always by nature a hater of gods!

Prometheus: A pure Timon![187] But, so that I can run away again,
Hold the parasol, so that if Zeus should see me
From above, I will look like I am following the basket bearer.[188]

Peisthetairos: And take this stool here,[189] and be the stool-carrier!

Chorus: And then near the Shadefoots[190] there is
A certain marshy lake, where the unwashed
Socrates leads souls;
And there Peisander came,[191]
Begging to see the soul which
Departed from him early while he was still alive,
Having a baby camel as sacrificial victim—
Whose throat he cut,
Like Odysseus did,[192] and went away,
While behind him there came up from below
To the blood of the camel
The vampire bat Chaerephon.

[Enter Poseidon, Heracles, and a barbarian god, Triballian.]

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187. Timon was an Athenian proverbial for the hatred he bore his fellow Athenians.

188. In the Panathenaic processions, maidens from the best families had the honor of carrying the baskets, each followed by a maiden of a non-citizen resident family carrying a stool, and attended by a parasol bearer.

189. The word was euphemistically used for a trivet on which a chamber pot sat.

190. A mythic people inhabiting the Atlantic coast of Africa; they had feet so large that they used them for shade.

191. A democratic, and then later an oligarchic politician often lampooned for cowardice.

192. This is all a parodic reference to Odysseus's visit to the underworld (*Odyssey* 11.35ff.; dramatized in the lost *Soul Leaders* of Aeschylus), where he summoned and inquired of the souls of the dead by pouring blood in a trench for them to drink.

Poseidon: The city of Cloudcuckooia
Is here visible, the destination of our embassy.
[To Triballian] You, whatever *are* you doing? You're wearing your cloak on the left!?!?[193]
Won't you change it to the right?!
You ill-starred one! What are you by nature—a Laispodias?[194]
Oh Democracy! Where will you ever take us,
If the gods are going to choose by vote such a one as this!
Will you hold still?! [Trying to adjust Triballian's cloak] Go hang! You are really the most
Barbarian of all gods I have ever seen!
Look here, what are we going to do, Heracles?

Heracles: You have heard
From me, at any rate, that I wish to throttle the human,
Whoever it was, that once walled out the gods!

Poseidon: But my good fellow, we have been elected envoys for *negotiations*!

Heracles: So throttle him twice over, in my opinion!

Peisthetairos: Somebody give me the grater! Bring the silphium spice!
Somebody bring the cheese! Stir up the coals!

Poseidon: We three gods bid greeting to the man!

Peisthetairos: But I'm busy grating the silphium spice now.

Heracles: What's this meat the flesh of?

Peisthetairos: Some birds,
Having risen up against the people's party of the birds,
Were judged to have committed injustice.

Heracles: So first you grate
Silphium over them?

Peisthetairos: Oh, hello there, Heracles! What's afoot?

Poseidon: We have come as envoys
From the gods to negotiate an end to the war.

193. A cardinal sin of upper class decorum: wrongly draping one's cloak.

194. A politician who apparently had an unsightly leg which he concealed by awkwardly draping his cloak.

Peisthetairos: Hey, there's no olive oil in the flask!

Heracles: Yeah, and bird-meat ought to be well oiled!

Poseidon: For we do not gain from warring;
And you, if you were to have friendly relations with us gods,
Would have rain water in your pools
And Halcyon days you would reap always!
We come invested with full authority in all these matters.

Peisthetairos: But we never began
To make war before you did; and now we are willing—if so it is decided,
If only you are now willing to do something just—
To make a peace treaty. And the just things are the following:
Zeus is to give back to us birds the scepter;
AND, if we come to an agreement
On these terms, . . . I'll invite the ambassadors to dine!

Heracles: For me these things suit, and I vote for it.

Poseidon: What, you ill-starred fool! You are a simpleton and just a stomach!
You would deprive your own father of the tyranny?!

Peisthetairos: Is that true? Won't you gods in fact have MORE
Strength, if the birds rule below?
Because now, hidden by the clouds,
The mortals skulk and falsify their oaths;
But, if you have the birds as allies,
When someone swears by the crow and by Zeus,
The crow in stealth will come by that false swearer,
And, flying upon him, will by striking pluck out his eyes!

Poseidon: By Poseidon, these things are beautifully said!

Heracles: Seems so to me too.

Peisthetairos: So what do YOU say?

Triballian: Nabaisatreu.[195]

Heracles: You see? This one too praises it.

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195. Gibberish, but the beginning (Na) sounds like Greek for "yes" (*nai*).

PEISTHETAIROS: And now in still another way
You will hear how much good we will do you.
If one of the humans to one of the gods
Should in prayer vow a sacrificial victim, and then sophistically say,
"The gods are patient"—not giving it back out of greed,
We'll undo also these things.

POSEIDON: Come, show—in what way?

PEISTHETAIROS: When this human happens to be counting his money,
Or to be sitting in his bath,
A kite will stealthily fly down and seize
The price of two sheep, which he will bring up to the god!

HERACLES: I again vote to give back the scepter to these!

POSEIDON: And the Triballian—let him now speak.

HERACLES: Triballian, is it your decision to cry out in pain? [Raising his club.]

TRIBALLIAN: Younoclubit!

HERACLES: He declares that I speak very well.

POSEIDON: Oh well, if you both agree to these things, then so do I.

HERACLES: Listen you, it has been decided to do these things concerning the scepter!

PEISTHETAIROS: By Zeus, there is another thing I've just happened to remember!
I give up Hera to Zeus,
But: that girl who's Queen [Basileia] is to be given to me as my wife.

POSEIDON: Your erotic passion is not for reconciliation!
Let's go back home!

PEISTHETAIROS: A lot I care!
Cook! You need to make the sauce sweet!

HERACLES: Poseidon, you-divinely possessed human! Where are you going!
Are we going to fight a war over one woman?[196]

196. The Trojan War was fought over one woman (Helen): the gods here lack respectful memory of the greatest Greek war.

POSEIDON: Well what *are* we to do?

HERACLES: What?! Come to terms!

POSEIDON: You dumbell! Don't you know you've been cheated?
You are hurting yourself! For if Zeus dies,
And hands the tyranny down to these,
You'll be impoverished! For all the wealth becomes yours—
As much as Zeus leaves when he dies!

PEISTHETAIROS: Ai yi-yi, how he is sophistically lying to you!
Come aside here, so that I can explain something to you.
Your uncle's deceiving you, wretch!
For not a bit of your patrimony is yours,
According to the laws: for you are a bastard, and not legitimate!

HERACLES: ME?! A *bastard*? What are you saying?

PEISTHETAIROS: By Zeus, you
Are the child of a foreign woman![197] Or how else
Would Athena ever be the heiress, do you suppose,
When she is a daughter, if there were *legitimate* brothers?!

HERACLES: Well, but what if my father gives me the money
After he has died, as a legacy to a bastard?

PEISTHETAIROS: The law won't allow it.
This Poseidon here, who now excites you on, will be the first
To wrest from you the patrimonial funds,
Claiming that he is a legitimate brother!
But I will read out to you the Solonic law:
"To a bastard
There is not to be
Rights of close kinship,
Where there are legitimate children.
And if there should not be legitimate children,
The money is to be shared by the nearest of kin."[198]

HERACLES: I get no share of the patrimonial property?

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197. The mother of Heracles was the mortal human Alcmene, wife of Amphitryon.
198. Not in meter; an actual quotation from the law (also quoted in Demosthenes 43.51).

PEISTHETAIROS: NO, by Zeus! —And tell me,
Has your father already introduced you to his *phratry*[199] brothers?

HERACLES: Not me, no. . . . And indeed, I've been wondering about that, for quite a while. 1670

PEISTHETAIROS: Why indeed are you gaping up?—to look for a fight?
But if you are with us, I, having set you up as
Tyrant, will provide you with birds' milk!

HERACLES: In my opinion, you speak things of long-standing justice.
As regards the girl, and for my part, I let you have her!

PEISTHETAIROS: So what do YOU say?

POSEIDON: I vote the contrary!

PEISTHETAIROS: So the whole matter is up to the Triballian. What do you say?

TRIBALLIAN: Bootiful girl and great queen
Bird I give!

HERACLES: He says to hand her over!

POSEIDON: By Zeus, this fellow does NOT say to hand her over! 1680
He twitters away like the swallows!

PEISTHETAIROS: So he says give her to the swallows!

POSEIDON: You two negotiate and come to terms;
I, if you two agree, shall remain silent!

HERACLES: Everything you say is agreeable to us.
But come with us yourself into heaven,
So that you may take the queen [Basileia] and all things there.

PEISTHETAIROS: Well then, these were slaughtered just in time
For the wedding festivities!

HERACLES: You want me
To stay here and cook the meat meanwhile? You all go ahead! 1690

POSEIDON: YOU are going to cook the meat? You mean, to do a lot of gobbling!
You're going with us, right?!

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199. The religious guild, descended from a common ancestor, to which every legitimate Athenian male needed to be formally presented in order to gain citizenship.

Heracles: But I would have done it so well!

Peisthetairos: Someone bring me a wedding robe!

Chorus: And there is in Phanae, near
The water-clock,[200] a rascally
Race that fills-its-belly-with-its-tongue[201]—
Who reap and sow,
And gather grapes (and figs[202])
With their tongues.
Barbarians are this race,
Gorgiases and Phillips.[203]
And from the belly-fillers-with-the-tongue,
These Phillips,
Everywhere in Attica,
The tongue is cut away![204]

Herald: Oh you doers of all good things, greater than can be spoken!
Oh thrice-blessed winged race of birds,
Welcome the tyrant to the prosperous halls!
For he approaches, shining as no all-blazing
Star has ever been approaching its golden-rayed home!
The incandescence of the rays of the far-shining sun
Has not been so bright as his coming,
Possessed of a wife whose beauty is beyond utterance,
And wielding the thunderbolt, the winged shaft of Zeus!
An ineffable fragrance ascends to the depth of the sphere above,
Beautiful to behold; and breezes
Blow away the wreath of smoke from the incense!
And here he is, himself! Let the divine
Muse open Her sacred and auspicious mouth [to sing]:

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200. A water clock was used to time the speeches in lawsuits; "Phanae" was a town in Chios, whose name sounds like a word that can mean "to denounce" or "to indict" (*phainein*).

201. A word invented to play on a common term of scorn for laborers—a race "that fills-its-belly-with-its-hands."

202. The word has the same root as the word "sycophant."

203. Gorgias is the famous teacher of rhetoric; Phillip was one of his Athenian students (*Wasps* 421).

204. The custom in sacrifices was to cut the tongue out of the victim.

Chorus: Move back! Make way! Draw together! Stand aside! 1720
Fly around
The blessed one with his blessed fortune!
Oh, wow! Wow!
The bloom, the beauty!
Oh You who have entered into a marriage most blessed for this city!

Chorus Leader: Great, great fortune has overtaken
The race of birds
Through this man! But
Welcome with wedding songs and nuptial songs—
Him and his Queen! 1730

Chorus: Once with Olympian Hera
Of the lofty thrones
The great ruler of the gods
Was conducted by the Fates
On that wedding day!
Hymen, Oh Hymenaeus!
Hymen, Oh Hymenaeus![205]

And Eros, flourishing on all sides,
Golden-winged,
Steered straight with his bridle stretched back,
The best-man driver of the chariot at the marriage of Zeus 1740
And the happy Hera.
Hymen, Oh Hymenaeus!
Hymen, Oh Hymenaeus!

Peisthetairos: I am charmed by the hymns, I am charmed by the songs;
And I delight in the words. Come now,
Celebrate also his earth-echoing thunder,
And fiery lightning of Zeus,
And terrible white-hot bolt![206]

Chorus: Oh great light of golden lightning!
Oh immortal fire-bearing spear of Zeus!

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205. Two names of the god of marriage.
206. The line is Homeric: *Iliad* 8.133.

Oh heavily groaning, earth-echoing,
And—simultaneously—rain-bearing thunders,
With which *this* one *now* shakes the earth!
Having entirely overpowered Zeus,
He possesses also the Queen [Basileia] who sat beside Zeus![207]
Hymen, Oh Hymenaeus!

Peisthetairos: Follow now the wedding party, Oh
All you tribes of flocking
Feathered ones—up to the floor of Zeus
And to the marriage bed!
Extend, Oh blessed one, your
Hand, and taking my wings,
Dance with me!
And I shall take you and lightly lift you up!

Chorus: Ala-lal-lai! raise the Paean—
Taenella! Most noble of victors![208]
Oh highest of the divinities!

* gods surrender rule over world, Pride + P in charge now
- are there dark undertones here?

207. According to poetic tradition, it was the goddess Justice who sat beside Zeus: Hesiod *Works and Days* 256ff.; Pindar *Olympian Odes* 8.28; Sophocles *Oedipus at Colonus* 1267, 1382; see also Demosthenes 25.11. Basileia is an invention of Aristophanes. The replacement of Justice by Basileia is both a radical theological innovation by Aristophanes, and an indication that justice has been eclipsed by royal sway in the regime of Peisthetairos.

208. "Taenella" is a word invented by the poet Archilochus (frag. 119) to imitate the sound of the twanged string at the beginning of the traditional triumphal song to Heracles with which victors in the games were saluted; hence this line ("Taenella! Most noble of victors!") became formulaic.